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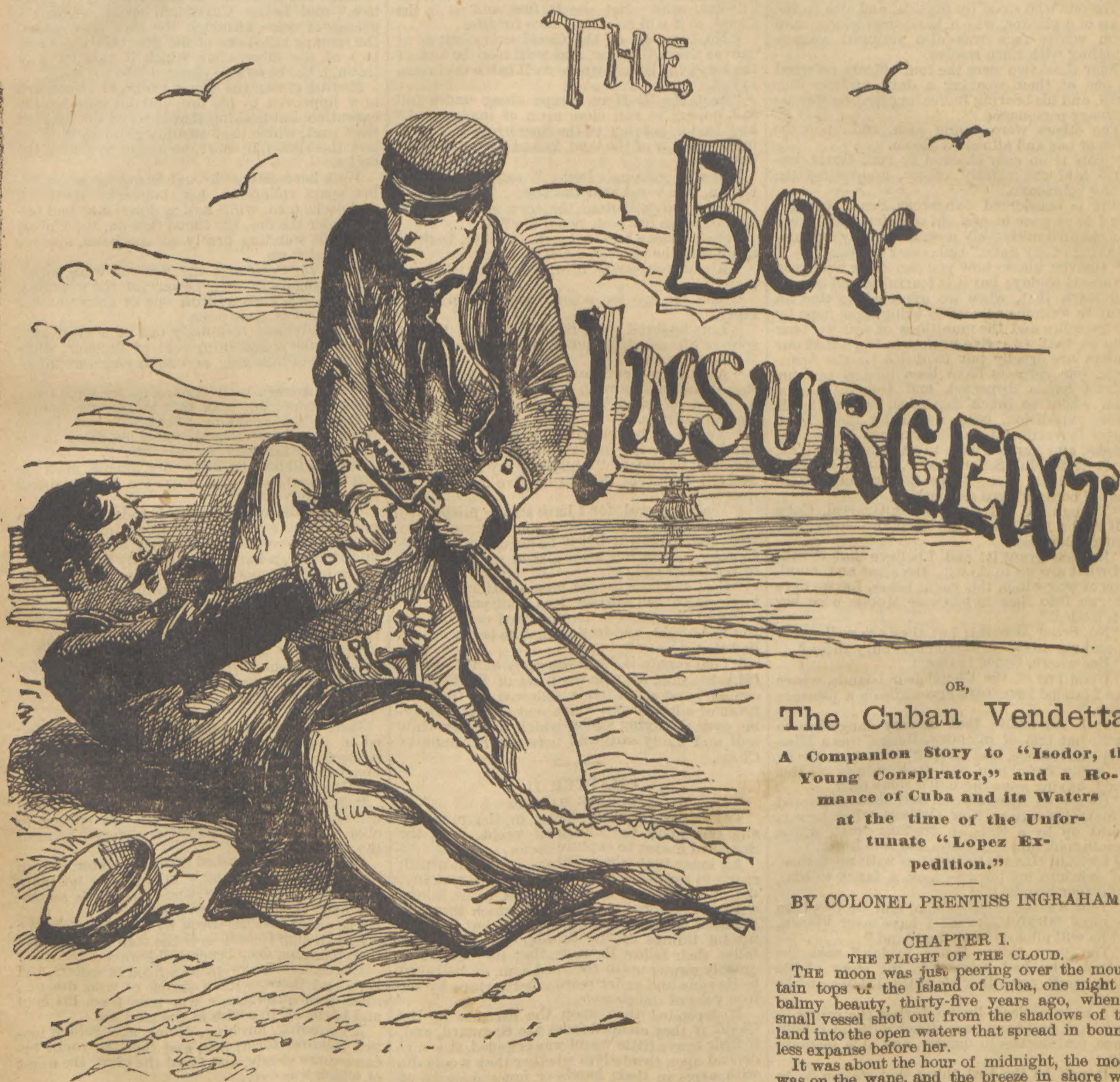
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OR,
The Cuban Vendetta.

A Companion Story to "Isodor, the Young Conspirator," and a Romance of Cuba and its Waters at the time of the Unfortunate "Lopez Expedition."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLIGHT OF THE CLOUD.

THE moon was just peering over the mountain tops of the Island of Cuba, one night of balmy beauty, thirty-five years ago, when a small vessel shot out from the shadows of the land into the open waters that spread in boundless expanse before her.

It was about the hour of midnight, the moon was on the wane, and the breeze in shore was light and laden with the odor of a thousand flowers, while a league away, in deep water, the

"YOU ARE WOUNDED AND I WILL NOT KILL YOU, THOUGH I WILL TAKE FROM YOU YOUR DIAMOND CUTLASS, THE BADGE OF YOUR RED WORK AGAINST CUBANS."

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moonlight's rays fall upon the white-caps, tossed up by a fresh wind, causing them to sparkle like diamond sprays.

The trim look of the craft, caused her to be set down at once as a yacht, belonging to one of the plantations upon the coast; but a clearer look upon her decks revealed the fact that she was crowded with men.

She was gliding along under easy sail, a black crew standing ready to obey the orders of her commander, while amidships were gathered a number of dark-faced men, all armed and in uniform.

Aft stood a group of half a dozen men, four of whom wore the uniform of officers, the other two being attired in the garb of Cuban planters.

One of these latter was at the helm, and the moonlight revealed him to be a mere boy in years, scarcely over sixteen, while his face was as refined, and faultless in feature as a woman's.

He had the air of a young aristocrat, was handsomely attired, and his dark face, resolute and fearless at all times, now wore an expression of strangely commingled sternness and sorrow.

His large eyes were bent upon the sea ahead, alternately with his vessel, and his hands clasped the helm with a grip that seemed to keep down pent-up emotions of the deepest kind.

The one who stood by his side, and also in the dress of a planter, was a handsome young man upon whose face was also stamped sadness mingling with stern resolve.

Near these two were the four officers referred to, one of them wearing a dark, undress uniform, and his bearing indicating that he was no ordinary personage.

The others were young men, and upon the faces of one and all rested gloom.

"This is no easy channel to run, Senor Isodor," said the elderly officer, addressing the young helmsman.

"It is considered dangerous, Senor General; but I have gone in and out so often that I keep the channel intuitively now, and really was not thinking of my duty," responded the youth.

"Heaven knows how you can after what you witnessed to-day; but it is fearful to run in here and learn that, when we expected to find an army to welcome us, and to bring them hope by our presence and the munitions of war we bear with us, that we arrive in time to learn that our leaders are cruelly put to death by the Spaniards, our retreats have been broken up, our Patriot bands dispersed, and General Lopez, upon whom so much depended, has, with his whole expedition, been seized by the United States Government, in the moment of nearing success, and carried back to an American port.

"It is fearful, Senor Isodor, fearful indeed," and the dark face of the Cuban conspirator general became stern as death.

"Though we fail now, Senor General, Cuba will yet be free," was the stern response of the young helmsman.

"Heaven grant it! and I believe that it will; but what are we to do with the arms and munitions of war which this yacht bears, for we dare not run into New Orleans or Mobile with her thus loaded?"

"No, Senor General; but they are well packed, and my advice is to land and bury them."

"But where, Senor Isodor?"

"Upon one of the Chandeleur Islands, where once I landed two years ago while on a pleasure cruise.

"It is an island that is very dangerous to reach; but one of my crew, Bueno, was a Mississippi slave once, and having a cruel master he ran away from him and took refuge on this island, having gone there in a small skiff.

"He stayed there a year, and then attempted to make his way to New Orleans, when he was picked up by a Spanish trading craft, whose captain took him into Cuba and sold him.

"I was in Havana at the time with my father, and saw him up for sale, took a fancy to him, and father bought him.

"That was eight years ago, and he has been the most faithful servant I have ever known, and he will pilot us in to the island."

"The very thing, Senor Isodor," said the general, who had listened to the story of the Cuban youth regarding his faithful slave, and he added:

"I have noticed Bueno during the cruise to the island, and have been struck with his intelligence, fearlessness in danger, and able seamanship.

"It will be the best thing that we can do to bury the arms on the island, there to await a second uprising upon the island, which will soon come, I am sure, as General Narciso Lopez is

not the man to drop a scheme in which he has placed his life, fortune and sword."

"May it come soon, senor, for I have registered a vow, after what I saw the few hours I was on my native island, that must be kept," said the Cuban youth with fierce energy.

"Sail ho!" suddenly came from forward.

"See! Bueno is on the alert, general, for that was his voice," cried Isodor Christobal, and then he called out:

"Whereaway, Bueno?"

"She's creeping out from under the shadow of Rocky Point, Senor Isodor," was the response of the negro, who did not speak in the dialect of the plantation slave of America.

"Ay, ay, I see her," and calling to Bueno to take the helm, for he knew the channel, the youth turned his glass upon the strange sail.

"It is a craft I know well," he said slowly.

"Well, Senor Isodor?" queried the general.

"It is the Spanish brig-of-war El Moro, and her captain and officers have often been guests at Villa Vista, my father's home, when they have anchored in the plantation harbor; but it is different now, and they would string me up to the yard-arm without mercy did they catch me."

"It is catching before hanging, Senor Isodor, as they say in the United States," said the general.

"Yes, senor; but she is fast, and so is the Cloud, so it will be a close race for life.

"Ho, boys, set on the Cloud every stitch of canvas that will draw, and we'll soon be out of the lee of the island, where we'll catch the breeze in full.

"See! the El Moro creeps along under full sail, hoping to run close upon us unobserved," and Isodor pointed to the Spanish brig, which, in the shadow of the land, looked like a phantom craft.

"She is gaining, Isodor," said the young Cuban, who stood near the boy.

"Yes, and will until the crew gets the Cloud dressed up in her best, Senor De Soto.

"She carries a hundred men, I believe, Isodor," again said the planter, Leon De Soto.

"About four-score men, senor; I think no more."

"And we are two-score," was the significant reply.

"I understand you, Senor De Soto, that in spite of all odds, if it comes to it, we must fight."

"To the death!"

"Ay, to the death, and with the knowledge that Spaniards show no quarter, no mercy must be given or asked," and Isodor spoke with savage earnestness.

"Yes, it is better to die with arms in our hands than by the garrote," remarked the general, and he added: "I will get my men ready, and tell them that it is to be give and take no quarter."

"Wait, general, for I have strong faith in my beautiful little Cloud, that she will run away from the Spaniard; but if he should cripple us, thereby preventing escape, then we must fight to the bitter end.

"See! she feels the sea breeze better now, and is surging ahead into an eight-knot pace."

"And there shoots the Spaniard out into the full moonlight, and he sees that he is discovered and that we are flying."

"That proves it," was the reply of the youthful helmsman, as from the bows of the Spanish cruiser burst a red flame, followed by the deep boom of a heavy gun which sent a solid shot flying over the flying yacht, which, with her white hull and many sails well bore out her name of Cloud.

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBLE DANGER.

THERE was now no doubt, in the minds of any one upon the insurgent yacht, that the Spaniard meant to capture them.

All knew that where Cubans were concerned, rising to throw off the yoke of Spanish tyranny, that they showed no mercy, and, to be taken, with a cargo of arms on board, which they had intended to land upon the coast, but for the fateful tidings of the disaster which had befallen their fellow Patriots, that they would be quickly swung up to the yard-arm, or be taken to Havana and suffer more cruel torture by the iron yoke of the garrote.

It depended then upon the fleetness of the Cloud, if they escaped from the Spaniard, and, if their brave little vessel was crippled, it would depend upon themselves whether they would die with arms in their hands or ignominiously at the yard-arm, or by execution in Havana.

As the cruiser came into view in the moonlight she began to fire rapidly, when she saw

that her first shot to come to was not heeded, and the iron hail rained thick and fast around the little vessel.

But not a shot touched a spar or the deck, and, while seeming to bear a charmed existence, the Cloud flew on like the very wind, steadily increasing the distance between her and her pursuer.

"That is one of the fleetest vessels in the Spanish navy, Senor General, and yet we drop her," said Isodor, the young Insurgent, with admiration of his craft.

"True, and yet you do not seem to carry the sail you might, on this craft, for she stands up, now as we get the full force of this twelve-knot breeze, as many a craft could not under much less canvas."

"Yes, Senor General, the Cloud will stand much taller masts and longer spars to spread one-third more of canvas than she at present carries.

"But she was built for safety, rather than speed, and after a model I myself cut out, and which so pleased my father that he had her built for me.

"If she was a trifle longer, and carried more canvas she would be more serviceable, and, if the Patriots intend to make another effort to free Cuba, I will then have a vessel after my own heart, and one which will defy pursuit.

"Ah! the Spaniard is improving in his practice," and Isodor Christobal spoke without a change of voice, although the shot that caused the remark killed one of the general's aides and two of the crew, after which it cuts its way through the bows and plunged into the sea.

Having gotten the exact range, the Spaniard now improved in his fire, and did considerable execution, but nothing that checked the flight of the Cloud, which kept steadily gaining, until at last the shot fell short, no longer reaching the decks.

With her sails cut through in numerous places, her spars splintered, her bulwarks shattered and decks torn, while half a dozen men had fallen under the fire, the Cloud flew on, the Cuban boy still standing firmly at the helm, his face grim and stern.

Leon De Soto and the general were amid ships, doing all in their power for the wounded, and the black crew, with one of their number dead, stood at their posts.

Suddenly, and seemingly out of a clear sky, there came a deafening peal of thunder, while the glare of lightning accompanying was blinding.

"The storm's been coming up for some time, Senor Isodor; but with that worse one astern, I didn't say anything about it," and Bueno pointed to the Spanish vessel as more to be dreaded by far than the elements.

"We will hold on as we are, Bueno, until the last moment, for in the storm the Spaniard will have the advantage.

"But stand by the halyards to let all fly at a moments' notice," answered Isodor, and Bueno, a tall, copper-colored negro, with an erect form and Herculean build, went quickly forward.

For half an hour longer the Cloud held on under full sail, dropping the Spaniard further and further astern, until she was barely visible upon the sea, for the heavens were now overcast and the darkness was deepening each moment.

"Stand by to let fly all!" cried Isodor, in a voice that went to the furthest end of the yacht, and the crew answered in chorus:

"All ready, senor!"

"Let go!"

With a wild fluttering, like huge birds wounded in their flight, the white sails came down, while the yacht crept up into the wind and laid under bare poles.

"Get that canvas furled, boys!"

"Quick! or the hurricane will carry it from us!" shouted Isodor, and every one sprung to obey, and soon had the yacht stripped to meet the tempest.

Down upon her rushed a wall of water, driven by the hurricane, which in southern latitudes rises with such velocity, and often sends an unprepared vessel to the bottom.

The yacht met the shock by bounding into the air, as though to leap over the wall of foam, and then plunging deep beneath the waves.

Her decks were swept by a flood of waters, and here and there, with a shriek of wild despair, some poor unfortunate was torn from his hold and borne off to perish in the mad sea.

A bounding, lurching, diving and rolling motion followed for awhile, and then the yacht became more steady, and faced the blow, the worst of which was over.

It was full an hour before the tempest abated, and then a sigh of relief went up from all, while the general said:

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"You are a splendid commander, Senor Isodor, and you handled your vessel in a manner that alone saved us from a peril as great, though not to be avoided with such dread, as had the El Moro captured us."

"I am not so sure, senor, that she is not somewhere near us now, for I distinctly heard a voice shouting through a trumpet a short while ago."

"Was it not from our vessel, Senor Isodor?"

"No, senor, for the voice was through a trumpet— Ho, Bueno!"

"Yes, Senor Master."

"Look sharp for the El Moro."

"I think I've got my eye on her now, Senor Master—yes, senor, it is the brig!" and as the moon broke through a cloud there was visible, not half a mile distant, the Spanish brig.

"She is lying to! Quick, Bueno! set the sails reefed down, and we'll run away before the wind, for we are not discovered yet!"

The order was rapidly and noiselessly obeyed, and falling off before the wind, the Cloud went staggering along, huge waves rolling before, upon either side and astern of her, and threatening to bury her beneath them, it seemed.

On, on, flew the Cloud, getting further and further away from her dread foe, until she had dropped her almost out of sight in the darkness.

But then the moon went out through a rift in the clouds, its rays fell upon the white sails of the yacht, causing them to glimmer in the light like silver, and Bueno called out:

"They see us at last, Senor Master!"

"Ay, ay, and again it is a race for life, with the chances in favor of the brig in this heavy sea."

"But we better run under than die at the yard-arm, so crowd on sail, boys, and shake out the reefs to a single, for there is a worse death in our wake than in the sea for us," and Isodor's voice rung out like a bugle, yet held not a quiver of fear in it.

CHAPTER III.

DRIVEN TO DOOM.

NERVED by the words of their boy commander, the sable crew of the yacht sprung to work with a will, and, aided by the Cuban Patriots on board, soon had all the canvas set that the Cloud could possibly bear in that blow.

As it was, she reeled like a man foolish with wine, and fairly staggered through the rough waters.

"We are straining her, but it must be done," said the Cuban general, and he glanced anxiously at the little vessel, as she rushed along, the waves above her decks upon either side, and astern, while it seemed ahead as though a wave of water was there into which she must rush to doom.

"I'll keep her at it if I run her under, for we better drown than hang," grimly said Isodor Christobal.

The brig, large as she is, does not dare carry the sail you have set, Isodor," said Leon De Soto.

"No, for they are not running from the garrote; but as it is, she has as much as she can well stand up under," and it was very evident that the Spaniard was carrying as much canvas as he dared set, for fear of dragging the sticks out of the brig.

"We are gaining pretty fast, Senor Master," said Bueno, coming aft.

"Yes, Bueno, we are; but the brig intends to try to cripple us," and this remark was occasioned by a shot from the Spaniard.

But in that wild sea there could be no aim taken, and the shot flew far out of the way.

Still the Spaniard kept up the fire, and still the yacht slowly gained, until, just as the sun rose the Cubans gave a shout of joy, for they saw that the iron messengers failed to reach them, falling short a few rods.

Thus the fierce chase continued, the yacht barely holding her own, as she had been so severely driven that she was badly strained, and was leaking to an alarming extent.

The storm had wholly blown itself out; but the wind held at a twelve-knot breeze, and the sea was by no means smooth.

But on her way the Cloud drove, Isodor standing untiringly at the helm, and taking every advantage of wind and wave, while the others did all in their power to keep the pumps going and the sails trimmed.

Through the long hours of the day the chase continued, and again night came on; but it was starlight, and there was no chance to dodge the enemy in the darkness.

Now and then the Spaniard would creep up just within range, and instantly open fire, and

once or twice the yacht got a bad wound; but again she would forge ahead until the shots fell short.

Thus the night passed away, and the brig still held on like a hound on the trail.

She was crowded with canvas, and they were pushing her hard; but Isodor gave the yacht no relief, but kept her at it, although the water steadily gained in the hold, and necessarily checked her speed.

"To-night we must meet the islands, and we must not be taken," said Isodor, as the sun drew near the western horizon.

"They cannot be very far away, Senor Isodor, as we have driven along at a tremendous speed ever since leaving Cuba," answered the general.

"They are about ten leagues off, senor."

"And then?" asked Leon De Soto.

"We must drive the yacht ashore," was the cool reply of the youth.

"Ashore, Isodor?"

"Yes, for the Spaniards shall not have this cargo, and Bueno can run us upon a sunken reef."

"We have our boats intact, and can take to them under cover of the darkness, cast off before we reach the reef, and then rush her upon it under full speed."

"The wind is increasing and the Spaniards will think we have gone to our doom, while we can, under Bueno's pilotage, row to the island and seek shelter."

"I would like to save the cargo, but we cannot, and our lives are more precious."

"You are right, Senor Isodor, and you are the commander, so do as you deem best; but it is a pity to lose your beautiful vessel," said the Cuban general.

"She is badly strained, sir, and I have all the drawings with me, and the model, to build another craft just like her, only larger," was the response of the youth, and he sent Bueno to the top to see if he could discover land.

Hardly had the negro reached the top, when he shouted out:

"Land, ho!"

"How does it bear, Bueno?"

"Dead ahead, senor."

"It is the Chandelers, and in three hours we will reach them," he said to those about him, and then called out aloft:

"Pick out your island, Bueno, tell me how to head to reach it, and then come down."

"Ay, ay, Senor Master," answered the negro, and he bent his glass upon the distant land.

Half an hour passed before he called to the deck again, and then, just as the sun touched the horizon, he cried:

"Ho, the deck, senor!"

"Ay, ay, Bueno!"

"Let her fall off, senor."

"Ay, ay!"

"More yet!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Steady now! you are heading directly for it, senor, so keep her at that!"

"Ay, ay, Bueno," and Isodor took his sailing points and held the yacht on her course, running almost dead before the wind.

"Now, senor, let me take the helm," and Bueno came to his side, and Isodor relinquished the helm to the negro, while he called out:

"Now, boys, get the two boats and the skiff loaded with what stores we may need, and let every man go double armed with rifles and revolvers, for it may be that we may have to fight on yonder island."

These orders were promptly obeyed, and the boats were all ready to let fall into the sea at the proper moment, the crews of each being stationed by them, excepting the men still kept at the pumps.

"With her heavy cargo, and the water in her hold, she will go into kindling wood when she strikes, for we have a twelve-knot breeze astern of us," said Isodor.

"But how will you steer her on, after we leave her?" asked Leon De Soto.

"I will let Bueno head her for the sunken reef, which he knows well, and I will follow close in the skiff to pick him up, for, before she strikes he must jump overboard."

"It is risky work," said the general.

"Not as risky as allowing yonder Spaniard to catch us, senor; but see, the brig gains rapidly now, for the leak is making the yacht loggy."

All eyes were now alternately turned upon the yacht, the island looming up ahead, and the brig, steadily gaining astern, yet still a long way off and just visible in the darkness.

As the yacht drew nearer to the island, Isodor ordered one boat's crew to stand ready, sending two of his slaves with it.

It was lowered into the water without acci-

dent, and while dragged rapidly along the men entered it, the staff officers going in charge.

"Cast loose!" ordered Isodor, and the boat was left dancing in the wake, and pulling after the yacht with strong strokes.

"The next boat! General, you go in this, and my two slaves will manage it," called the youth, and it too was safely launched and left astern.

Isodor, Leon De Soto and Bueno were now all that were left upon the yacht.

The light skiff was then put over the side, Leon De Soto taking his seat therein, and Isodor said:

"Bueno, you better let me run her on the reef, and you go in the skiff."

"No, Senor Master, for I know just where to put her, and I can swim like a fish, as you know."

"You must spring overboard in plenty of time, Bueno."

"Yes, senor."

"And off to one side, with a dive, so as not to be dragged under by the yacht."

"Yes, senor."

The negro now stood at the helm, and though the island was yet half a mile distant, the seething waters just ahead proved that there were sunken reefs there.

"She is settling fast, senor; now the pumps have stopped, and when she strikes the Spaniards will hear the crash," said Bueno.

"Thank Heaven they do not get her. Ah! she shall go down with the Patriot flag flying," cried Isodor, and he darted down into the cabin.

Returning in an instant he soon ran up a silk Cuban flag, which his sister Estrella had made, and then said:

"Now she goes down in glory to her doom."

"Quick, Senor Master! Into the skiff!" cried Bueno, and Isodor sprang into the little boat.

"Cast off!" shouted Bueno, and the youth obeyed, at the same time seizing the oars, for the little shell was dancing like a cork in the wake of the flying yacht.

"Now, Bueno! leap for your life!" cried Isodor, and heading the insurgent craft directly for the reef the daring negro sprang into the sea.

The next instant there came a deafening crash, and the beautiful Cloud had driven to her doom upon the sunken reef.

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARED TO GREET A FOE.

THE moment that he saw that the doomed yacht must strike just where he intended she should, Bueno had lashed the helm, and then, with a run, had sprung head-first into the sea.

He disappeared from sight for an instant, and then arose, just as the Cloud drove upon the reef.

Isodor, in the light skiff, was not far away, and the negro hailing him, he pulled rapidly toward him, while Leon De Soto aided him into the boat.

"Give me the oars, Senor Master, for your hands are all blistered with holding the helm, and we've got to pull hard from here and make for the channel," cried Bueno, and he seized the oars and sent the skiff away from her perilous proximity to the reefs with a few vigorous strokes.

The two boats containing the others were not very far distant, and hailing them, Isodor made them follow the skiff.

This they did, and after running along the reef for a few hundred feet, Bueno said:

"Now, Senor Master, if you will row, I will steer, for I've got to have my eyes open to run through here, as it's been so long since I left the island."

The two then exchanged places, and the boats astern coming close up, the three started to run the gantlet of the dangerous channel leading to the rocks.

In a calm sea, and by daylight, Bueno said one could feel his way in; but in such rough water and night it was a most dangerous undertaking.

But Bueno seemed not to have forgotten his cunning, and went by dangerous reefs without once striking, while the boats astern kept as close in his wake as they dared.

"The brig is shortening sail," said Isodor, who while rowing had his face turned seaward.

"Yes, Senor Master, she doesn't want to run too close on this island at the speed she has been going," answered Bueno.

Continuing to watch the movements of the brig as he rowed along, Isodor said:

"Well, the Spaniards doubtless think that we were wrecked by accident, and are congratulating themselves that death overtook us, if they did not; but if I know Spanish nature aright, Senor Leon, the brig will anchor until morning,

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and then search the island to see if some poor devil has not escaped, that they may catch him and hang him."

"Or garrote him, Isodor; but I believe you are right, for she is running up into the wind as though to lay to," answered Leon De Soto!

"Ay, and there goes her anchor, so we are not yet to be left alone; but we must not be driven away from the island in this rough sea, as we could hardly make the mainland, loaded as our boats are, so we will have to land and fortify ourselves against an attack."

"I know a good place, Senor Master, and it is on the other side, where the brig cannot come near enough to harm us with her guns, and we will be able to keep the small boats off, or an attacking party on foot," said Bueno.

"The very thing, and there we will go, carrying our boats with us, to use, should we have to leave by night, when the sea runs down so that we dare make the attempt."

"And we can make a good fight, Isodor, thanks to your foresight in arming us all with two rifles each, and revolvers in plenty, while as we are provisioned for a week, we can stand it; but how about the water?"

"We have plenty for two days."

"And there's a spring where we will camp, Senor Master," added Bueno.

"Good! then let the Spaniards come, and if we do not make them regret invading American territory to capture Cubans, I am mistaken," Isodor said.

"We dare not appeal to the United States, as there is not an American among us, and it would be said Spain was but following up her rebellious subjects; and I do not think with the land as a background, that the Spaniards have sighted us."

"No, they have not seen us, Senor Leon, or they would have fired upon us," and as Isodor spoke the skiff went ashore upon a bit of sandy beach.

The other boats quickly followed, and Isodor explaining what was to be done, the men set to work to raise the boats upon their shoulders and carry them to the camping-place.

Bueno still acted as guide and led the way up through the center of the island to the shore toward the mainland.

Here, upon a rather high and precipitous bank, was a clump of trees, and hidden completely by their foliage a small cabin, which seemed to have been deserted for years.

"That was my home, Senor Master, you remember," said Bueno, gazing upon the little cabin as upon an old friend.

"Yes, Bueno, and it is the very spot we wish."

"Now, senor, we can go to work and throw us up a little breastwork here, of which the logs of this cabin can be a foundation, and our boats must be guarded well with earth, to escape the bullets, should we be attacked," said Isodor.

"You think it is necessary, Senor Isodor?" asked the general.

"I hope not, Senor General; but you saw that the brig came to an anchor, and she doubtless means to remain to let her commander see if this island is inhabited, in the morning, and it is best to prepare."

"True, and you have proven such a commander on the sea, Senor Isodor, that I readily yield to your opinion on shore, so get to work, men, and we'll build a little fort," and the general threw aside his coat and set the example manfully.

Thus several hours passed away, and then all sunk down to rest to await the coming of the morrow to see what it would bring forth for them.

The hours of the night passed away, all sleeping soundly except Isodor, and to his eyes slumber would not come.

There were scenes he had witnessed, and which the reader will soon know, during the past few days which had made him suffer with all the intensity of his nature, and register a vow in Heaven that he meant should be fulfilled to the letter some day.

To and fro he paced outside of the little grove of timber, where slept his commander, his heart full of bitter memories.

Thus the hours of the night dragged along, until at last the glimmer of dawn came in the east.

Soon after the skies grew rosy, and Isodor saw that the sea had run down, the wind had sunk to a balmy breeze, and he knew that the Spaniards were going to have placid water to enable them to land upon the island.

Landward, from the little fort, was an open field, across which their foes would have to come, exposed to a hot fire.

If they came by boat, they would also be exposed to a fire while approaching the shore, landing, and trying to scale the high bank to carry the fort by storm, and the brig could not get into a position to harm them with her heavy guns, so that Isodor congratulated himself upon their strong position.

"If the sea holds calm to-night, we can depart for the mainland, for I do not think that the Spaniards will imagine that we have boats with us, stores or arms, and will think we were shipwrecked and saved ourselves by swimming ashore."

"How they will be deceived, and, if they do not think we have boats, and consequently do not keep a close watch upon us, we will surprise them, that is certain, when darkness comes again."

So saying, Isodor went to a position from whence he could see the brig.

She lay quietly at anchor; but upon her decks there was considerable stir, and, while he looked he saw two boats lowered into the water.

"They have had an early breakfast, and intend to make a landing, that is certain."

"Now to arouse my comrades," and Isodor returned to the little fort, and found his companions still sleeping, for they were utterly tired out.

The sun was now up, and he called to them to awake.

"Comrades, the Spaniards are coming to breakfast with us, so arise and give them the welcome such distinguished guests deserve," he called out, and in an instant every man was upon his feet ready for the fray.

CHAPTER V.

THE ATTACK.

AFTER a hasty breakfast the Cubans set to work to look after their arms, while Bueno and Isodor started off to spy out the movements of the Spaniards.

Arriving at an embankment that gave them an opportunity of overlooking the sea and shore, Isodor and Bueno beheld the Spanish brig lying at anchor as near in-shore as she dared come.

In her rigging were two lookouts with glasses, watching the island closely, and leaving the vessel was a boat containing some twenty men.

On the way to the island, feeling its way with the greatest caution, was another boat containing four oarsmen, a helmsman, a lookout in the bows, and an officer standing up in the stern.

"They are in the right channel, Senor Master," said Bueno.

"Well, let them come, for I shall not regret it," responded the youth.

It was a long and tedious hunt to find the way to the island among the sunken reefs; but as last the boat grated upon the sandy beach, just where the Cubans had landed, and soon after the other one followed.

Here the Spaniards were seen to be examining the tracks in the sand, and Isodor remarked:

"They will find no marks of a boat having landed, as we took ours out of the water on our shoulders, so they will not think we have any."

"They'll get fooled, senor," returned Bueno.

Then he added:

"Here they come!"

The Spaniards now began to disperse about the island, one squad going along the beach in one direction, a second in another, and a third penetrating at once to the interior.

There were in all thirty men, as Bueno counted them and so stated.

"And we are thirty-three, Bueno; but it is time for us to be off," and the two hastened back to the little fort, which, by daylight looked quite formidable.

The cabin had been put into use as a breastwork, and dirt thrown over it, for Isodor had taken the precaution to put several spades, shovels and axes in the boats, and they had come in most handy.

The boats had been set into the ditches, out of which the dirt had been thrown and thus protected from bullets.

The thicket was not more than a fifth of an acre in size, with half a hundred large trees scattered through it, and underbrush about the edges, which completely concealed the interior.

A spring of crystal water was there, and the spot was certainly a stronghold in itself.

The general and Isodor placed the men in three squads, one under the Cuban leader, another under the youth, and the third having as its captain Leon De Soto, the staff officers being set apart to carry orders from one to the other.

Isodor had with him his negro crew and half a dozen Cubans, and all were armed with two

rifles, so that a second volley could be quickly fired.

It was not very long before a Spanish officer came into view, coming over a rise in the center of the island.

He was yet a long distance off, but Isodor grimly smiled as he said:

"That man is my game, and shall be Number One on my Vendetta list."

The Spaniard stood looking at the little cove of woods for an instant, and then called to his followers who came running toward him.

Then all stood watching for an instant, and after looking to their arms began to advance toward the timber.

Quickly then did Isodor walk out of the thicket into full view, and gave a loud hail.

Instantly half a dozen guns were thrown forward and fired at random; but, though the dirt was knocked up about his feet, the youth was unhurt and throwing the rifle to his shoulder he drew trigger.

With the report the Spanish officer dropped to the earth, and his comrades turned and fled to the shelter of the hill.

"That is Number One, Bueno, coolly said Isodor, as he returned to his place in the thicket, while cheers greeted him from the other two bands of Cubans.

The Spanish officer still lay where he had fallen, and his followers were heard calling for help, while there was one man seen upon a high point signaling to the brig.

A heavy gun was then fired from the brig, and answering shouts came from the two shore parties.

Again going out on a reconnoissance with Bueno, Isodor saw two other boats leaving the side of the brig, both crowded with men, and upon the beach where the others had landed were congregated the Spaniards in full force, all having been drawn back to the spot by the shooting and the signals.

Presently half a dozen men ascended the hill and made a dash for the fallen officer.

"You killed him, Senor Master," said Bueno, as he saw them bear him off, none of the Cubans firing.

"Yes, Bueno, I shot to kill," was the quiet response.

Having secured the body of the officer more signaling was done, and the gig left the El Moro with a dozen men in it.

They have not left half a score men on board, Bueno, I do not believe?

"No, senor, they mean to take us if they can."

"Yes, if they can; but come, we must return to the fort," and leaving their point of observation the youth and negro coolly started across the opening to rejoin their comrades.

The Spaniards caught sight of them, and at once ran upon the hill and opened fire.

But they were too far off for their bullets to reach them, and neither of the two quickened their pace.

After regaining the thicket Isodor went to the general and Leon De Soto, and told them just what he had seen.

"How many in all?" asked the general.

"Bueno counted thirty in the first party, twenty-nine in the second, and the gig is now coming ashore with thirteen more."

"Seventy-two in all," said De Soto.

"One less, Senor Leon, which I have charged to my revenge account," quietly said Isodor.

"Ah, yes, that was a crack shot you made, Senor Isodor," said the general, and without reply the youth returned to his little squad.

Half an hour of suspense followed, and then suddenly, from five different directions came as many squads of Spaniards, charging with cheers toward the timber.

At the same time along the beach appeared another party.

Each squad had about twelve men in it, and they came at a rapid run.

"Fire!" shouted Isodor, and his men obeyed, and a moment after the command of Leon De Soto followed suit, while the general's party opened in quick succession.

"Now take your other rifles and let that second party have it!" cried Isodor, and his tactics were closely followed by De Soto and the general.

The Spaniards were taken wholly by surprise, at meeting such a fearful rebuff, where they had expected to find hardly more than a dozen men, for they did not think half of those on board the yacht could have escaped the fearful wreck, for the Cloud's debris lay in hundreds of pieces along the shore.

In a panic they fled from the fire of the Cubans, leaving another officer and half a score of

men upon the field, and with some of those who fled, slightly wounded.

Instantly they signaled to the brig, which began to fire at the timber, cutting a branch off here, and raining showers of twigs and foliage down upon the heads of the Cubans, though doing no damage.

Taking two boat-loads of men, the Spaniards began to circle the island, with a view of discovering a better means of attack.

The crew of one boat advancing too near the timber got a heavy fire poured upon it which did some damage, and rapidly the Spaniards pulled out of range.

Finding that they could not get near by water, the Spaniards, also discovering by their survey that the brig could not be gotten into a position to do any damage, determined upon another plan.

This was to bring two twelve-pound cannon ashore, drag it upon the hill and open fire upon the little fort.

Isodor went out upon a survey and discovered this intention and quickly returned with the report.

"It will take them until dark to get the guns into position, and then they will doubtless open a heavy fire for half an hour, after which they will charge us in the darkness," he said.

"You are doubtless right, Senor Isodor," responded the general.

"Now, senors, my idea is, as the sea is comparatively calm, to get all ready for a retreat the very moment it is dark, and we can launch our boats at the other end of the island, and Bueno can pilot us into open water, while, he says, if the Spaniards discover us, and attempt to follow, they will be wrecked."

"You are the commander, Captain Christobal, so give your orders accordingly," said the general, with a smile.

"Senor General, you and the Senor De Soto have of course heard of El Capitan Atares, surnamed 'The Butcher,' on account of his red-handed work against the Cubans in 1844?"

"Yes, Senor Isodor, he is known but too well to all Cubans," answered the general.

"Well, I observed him among the leaders of the Spaniards, and you know he has a habit of cruising about the coast as the guest of the Spanish naval officers?"

"Yes, he is chief aide to the Captain-General, and does pretty much as he pleases," remarked De Soto.

"I suppose you also know, senors," continued Isodor, "that he was presented by the Spanish Volunteers with a diamond-hilted sword, having a gold scabbard, as an appreciation of his red work of butchery."

"True, and it is said to be worth a fortune, and he has often used it upon Cubans," the general said, bitterly.

"Well, I saw that sword in his hand, and it was its glitter that caused me to note the bearer and recognize 'The Butcher.'"

"Had I know it I would have been tempted to make a sortie, and endeavor to capture him."

"No, general, that is not needed, for he lies on yonder field, as I believe, dead, for I fired at his heart."

"But I shall soon know," and Isodor sprung over the breastwork and started across the field.

In vain did the general and De Soto call him back, for he would not heed, and held on his way directly for the spot where lay a heap of Spaniards who had fallen under the Cuban fire.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DIAMOND CUTLASS.

HAVING left their dead and wounded upon the field where they had fallen, the Spaniards dared not make an attempt to bear them off, so congregated, as Isodor had said, upon the shore, while the largest of the boats had been sent out to the brig to bring back a small cannon or two.

Isodor therefore saw none of the enemy when he started upon his hazardous undertaking, and hoped to accomplish his purpose unseen by them.

He walked at a brisk pace toward the fallen Spaniards, while the general, seeing that he heeded not the calls to return, ordered his men to stand ready to run to his rescue, should it be necessary.

Bueno in the mean time, had armed himself with two rifles, one being slung upon his back, and followed his young master, keeping some fifty paces behind him.

With erect mien and fearless face, Isodor walked directly toward the spot where he had seen the Spanish officer fall, whom he had recognized as "Atares. The Butcher," as the Cubans had named him.

In one group lay four Spaniards, and the one furthest off of this quartette was the man whom Isodor sought.

He was dressed in a gorgeous uniform, and lay upon the ground, his face toward the little fort, and in such a position that the two Spanish sailors and one marine lying in front of him, protected him in a measure from any shots the Cubans might fire.

The man was by no means dead, but his leg had received a severe wound which had brought him down, and he was unable to retreat.

He had a handsome face, but one that was utterly devoid of mercy, and was now marred by the pain he suffered, and the fury he felt at having had his comrades in arms run off and leave him upon the field.

He had an embroidered belt about his waist, and to it hung a cutlass in a scabbard of pure gold.

The hilt of the weapon was one mass of diamonds, and the shield to protect the hand was studded with rubies.

Upon the scabbard was his name, studded in precious stones, and an inscription in his honor for having been a merciless butcher toward Cubans.

As the officer saw Isodor approaching he started, moved nervously, and reaching out his hand, dragged the two bodies near him into a better breastwork.

A groan escaped from one of the men, who opened his eyes and looked into his face, while he said:

"I am not dead, Senor Capitan."

"It makes no difference, for I shall use you to protect my own precious life," was the heartless response.

Isodor saw the movements of the officer, and, drawing his pistol, quickened his pace toward him.

At the same instant Captain Atares gave a ringing halloo for help.

Instantly Isodor sprung into a run, and as he reached near the human breastwork a bullet whizzed by his head.

But it did not check the impetuous youth, who, as a second shot cut through his arm, sprung over the barrier and leveled his pistol at the head of the Spanish officer, while he said sternly:

"El Capitan Atares, well named The Butcher, did I do right, I would send a bullet through your coward heart; but you are wounded and I will take from you your Diamond Cutlass, the badge of your red work against Cubans."

As Isodor spoke he unbuckled the handsome belt from the waist of the Spaniard, the buckle being of solid gold, and glittering with gems.

"Never! I will die ere I give up my sword!" shouted the Spaniard, and he made an effort to resist; but Isodor was as strong as a young Hercules, and dashing him back upon the ground, placed his foot upon him, while he took the coveted weapon and buckled it around his own waist, at the same time scattering the other weapons of the Spaniard beyond his reach.

"You should thank me for your life, Spanish dog that you are," hissed the youth, just as there appeared over the rise of the hill half a dozen Spanish soldiers.

Instantly there came a shot and one fell, while the others sprung back to cover.

The shot had been fired by Bueno, who shouted:

"Fly, Senor Master, for they will return and fire a volley!"

"Ay, ay, Bueno, and I would not have you harmed through my reckless act; but I was determined to possess this sword."

"Now run for it," and the two dashed back toward the fort at full speed, just as a score of Spanish sailors came rushing over the hilltop, turning loose a desultory fire upon the fugitives.

Instantly Isodor and Bueno wheeled and threw their rifles to their shoulders, and a Spaniard was seen to fall; but the others pressed on, passed the wounded officer and it seemed that a charge was intended, when out sallied the Cuban general, Leon De Soto and a number of the Cuban soldiers, and hastening to the aid of the youth and negro a hot fire was begun with fatal results upon both sides.

But, as the Cubans showed a determination to rescue their comrades, the Spaniards fell back, although others were coming to the rescue, and Isodor and Bueno coming up, the little band retreated rapidly into the fort.

In their retreat the Spaniards carried off the wounded Captain Atares, and the Cubans took with them into their stronghold their one dead man and several wounded.

"Well, Captain Isodor, you got the cutlass," cried Leon De Soto with enthusiasm.

"Yes, and it is worth the risk I took, though

I am sorry that others than the Spaniards had to suffer through me."

"I shall christen you Captain Cutlass, Senor Isodor," remarked the general with a smile, and he took the cutlass and carefully examined it.

"But you are wounded, Isodor," anxiously said Leon De Soto, observing that his sleeve was stained with blood.

"It is but a slight wound, senor, and I will get Doctor Garcia to look at it, when he has finished with those others who need him more."

But the general at once called the surgeon, who was one of his staff, and an examination was made of the wound, which proved to be slight.

"It is a souvenir from Captain Atares, and one which I will not forget; any more than will he, I suppose, that I took his prized cutlass from him," and Isodor's face flushed with triumph, momentarily dispelling the look of deep sadness that seemed stamping itself thereon.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF NIGHT.

As soon as the excitement of the little affair, following the capture of the Diamond Cutlass had subsided, Isodor suggested to the general that preparations be made for the retreat.

The boats were accordingly parked in trim order, the sails gotten ready, and then all sat down to partake of a good meal, for they knew not when they would get another.

As the smoke of their fire was seen by the Spaniards, they came to the conclusion that the little Cuban band were taking things easy.

So confident were the Spaniards that the little party had no boat, that they did not think it necessary to set a guard upon them.

Bueno had slipped out, right after eating his combined dinner and supper, and had made his way to a point where he could see the movements of the Spaniards.

He was gone about an hour, and then returned with the information that Captain Atares had been carried on board the brig, along with the other wounded, and that the Spaniards had buried their dead.

He also stated that one twelve-pounder had been landed and boards had been laid to roll it up the hill on, while a second one was being then lowered into the large yawl.

He had counted the Spaniards and had found that they numbered over eighty, including a platoon of marines, which showed that El Moro had a larger crew than had been supposed, for Bueno said there was still quite a force left on the vessel.

"Well, Bueno, they will not be ready to open with their guns for fully an hour after dark, and by that time we will be a league or more away, and they will hardly reach the island for us until to-morrow," said Isodor.

It was now twilight, and the Cubans were all ready and most anxiously awaiting the order to depart.

Deeper and deeper grew the shadows, until the distant spars of the brig faded from view, then the sea was shaded in darkness and the general said:

"Well, Captain Cutlass, what do you say?"

"Let us start, Senor General," was the quiet response.

The boats were then raised to the shoulders of the men, the general, De Soto and Isodor carrying the light skiff, while Bueno led the way, as soon as he had thrown an armful of wood upon each of the fires, after the Cubans had left the fort which had served them so well.

A walk of a quarter of a mile brought the party to a steep hill leading down to the shore, and down this the boats were dragged, for the load had been a heavy one for the men.

Into the water then they were drawn, the crews sprung on board, and the skiff moved off in the lead, Bueno standing up in its bows, Isodor at the oars, and De Soto at the tiller.

The other boats slowly followed in the skiff's wake, and the island was left astern, the hearts of the Cubans rising with hope as they saw it fading away in the darkness.

With caution and skill Bueno guided the three boats through the dangers of the waters near the island, and after a while turned and said:

"Senor Master, it is open water now."

"You have done splendidly, Bueno, and now we can raise sail," averred Isodor.

"Better stick to the oars yet awhile, Senor Master, for a sail can be seen a long way off, and the brig might yet head the islands and capture us."

"You are ever thoughtful, good Bueno; but hark!" and the roar of a heavy gun was heard back on the island.

"The Spaniards are firing upon a deserted

fort," said the general, calling out from the boat astern.

"Yes, Senor General, and they are at it in earnest," responded Isodor, as the two pieces of ordnance brought from the brig began firing rapidly.

For fully half an hour the firing was kept up, and then came an instant of lull, after which, borne across the waters, were heard cheers and small-arms.

Then a sudden silence followed, and the Cubans knew that the fort had been stormed and taken by the Spaniards.

"Those Spaniards are as mad as tigers now," called out the general; and a laugh, at the expense of their foes, ran around the boats.

"Now we are out of sight, Bueno; so up with the mast and shake out the sail, for with my blistered hands rowing is getting monotonous," said Isodor, and the little mast was soon stepped and the leg-of-mutton sail spread to the breeze.

The other boats at once followed the example of the skiff, setting their sails, and the three little fugitive craft went sailing merrily along in their flight, driven by a light breeze.

Through the hours of the night they held on their way, and with the dawn were long leagues away from the island where they had so nearly met their doom; while many a joke was cracked at the expense of their foes, who had, upon the return of daylight, found their victims had escaped in some mysterious way, for victims to Spanish mercilessness they certainly would have been had they fallen into the power of the commander of the El Moro and his guest, Captain Atares, The Butcher and deadly foe to Cubans.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RETROSPECTIVE GLANCE.

In the outskirts of the pretty city of Mobile, on the Bay Road, at the time of which I write, there was a pleasant cottage house.

About it were large grounds filled with majestic trees and well-trimmed shrubbery, and the fence in front overlooked the shell drive, beyond which, a few rods distant, were the waters of Mobile Bay.

The house was a comfortable one, well furnished, and the front piazza overlooked the blue waters of the Bay, with the Ridge of Hollywood for the other shore, Mobile, a few miles up the river of the same name, to the left, and in the far distance to the right was the Gulf of Mexico—the great inland sea which has been the theater of piracy and romance for two centuries.

It was a home such as one might seek to while away in dreamy idleness the days of life, away from the busy whirl of turmoil, work, strife and gayety.

Upon the piazza, one bright morning, a week after the flight of the Cubans from the island, were seated two persons watching the lake steamer, running between New Orleans and Mobile, heading for the latter city.

As she came swiftly along, and was brought near the little home by a turn in the channel, one of the two persons upon the piazza sprang to her feet, and cried, excitedly:

"Mother, there stands brother Isodor upon the steamer's deck!"

"Impossible, Estrella, for your brother left in his yacht, and—"

"No, mother, it is not impossible, for it is Isodor!"

"See! there stands Bueno by his side, and the crew of the Cloud are also there."

"Oh! how happy I am to feel that we will soon know all."

"And your father, Estrella, I do not see him, though I do recognize my brave boy now," and the voice of the lady trembled while her eyes filled with tears.

"No, mother, father is not there, but Isodor brings us news of him."

The two were mother and daughter.

Their home was in Cuba, where the husband of the one, the father of the other, was one of the wealthiest planters in the "Ever Faithful Isle."

A Cuban born, he yet had been an officer of the army of Spain; but had resigned his commission to return to his estates, and enjoy a life of luxury and joy at his beautiful home of Villa Vista upon the coast, with his loved wife and two children, Isodor and Estrella.

A suspected Cuban chief, one who was said to have raised a secret league of Insurgents, he had been forced to take to the mountains and sound the tocsin of war, as he learned that he was to be arrested, while he forced his wife and daughter to fly in his son's yacht, to seek a haven in America.

The brave boy had found them a home upon the shores of Mobile Bay, and leaving them

there with the few faithful slaves they had brought with them, he had returned to Cuba in his yacht, bearing a precious cargo of arms and volunteers for the Insurgents, as the reader has seen.

The result of that unfortunate expedition is known, for General Lopez, the Cuban chief, with his men, had been captured by an American cruiser, the revolt had proven a failure by the arrest of the leaders, and the Cloud had been forced to return with her cargo and volunteers.

A beautiful woman, still youthful, for she was just upon the threshold of two-score years, the Senora Christobal's life now knew its first deep sorrow, in the peril of her husband, her exile from her home, and the absence of her noble boy.

Estrella Christobal was very like her mother in face, and possessed the erect and haughty carriage of her father.

She was noted as the most beautiful maiden in Cuba, as well as the heiress to vast wealth, and lovers were constantly pleading for her hand, but in vain.

Among them was Colonel Cazandra Morelos, a Spanish officer of noble title, but a man whose life had been one of reckless dissipation.

He was a favorite with Queen Isabella of Spain, the Captain-General of Cuba toadied to him, his officers and troops feared him, and Cubans hated him.

Refused by Estrella Christobal, he had shown his true nature to such an extent, that it was determination to force her to marry him, or bring death and ruin upon those of her name, that had forced them to make the midnight flight from the island, and Don Piedra Christobal to determine to take to the mountains and head the secret bands of Insurgents.

Reared in close companionship with her brother, whose senior she was by two years, Estrella had, like him, become a superb rider, a thorough sailor, a crack shot, and could handle a sword with wondrous skill.

One who beheld her in the grand parlors of Villa Vista, listened to her superb voice in song, discovered her great accomplishments as a lovely woman, would little dream that she possessed also accomplishments in which the sterner sex might feel proud to be her equal.

Was it a wonder then that the mother and daughter, upon discovering upon the steamer's deck the loved son and brother, accompanied by his black crew of the Cloud, became strangely excited?

He had departed in his beautiful yacht, and he returned upon the New Orleans steamer.

"He is waving to us, Estrella! let us hasten out to the gate, and then we will send the carriage up to town to meet him," and calling to a servant the Senora Christobal ordered the carriage to go up to the town to meet her son, after which she and Estrella ran to the gate and waved their kerchiefs until the flutter of the moving linen could no longer be seen, as the steamer sped on her way to her destination.

Two hours after the carriage drove up to the cottage gate, and from it sprang Isodor Christobal and Leon De Soto, while Bueno, his faithful black companion leaped down from the box.

Then followed the meeting between Isodor and his mother and sister, after which the youth said:

"Mother, you see the Senor De Soto has returned with me?"

Leon De Soto was a young Cuban planter, whose estates joined the plantation of Villa Vista.

He was handsome, rich, and dwelt with his aged parents and young sister in their handsome home, and the two families, the Christobals and De Sotos, had always been upon most intimate terms, while Leon had loved most devotedly Estrella from her early girlhood, but meeting with only friendly regard in return, had buried his love and been content to be her friend only.

"But, Isodor, you have not told me of your father, and both you and the Senor Leon look as though you had passed through a severe illness," and the Senora Christobal laid her hands upon the shoulders of her son and gazed straight into his face, while she became very pale, as it flashed upon her that some evil had befallen her husband.

"Mother! sister! it is of my father that I now would tell you."

"Come, let us sit here on the piazza," and Isodor spoke in a voice of the deepest sadness, while his words seemed a foreboding of evil.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORY OF AN EXECUTION.

"MOTHER, you may wonder why I returned by steamer, when I left in my yacht, and that

I did not at once tell you of my father, but alas! disaster has befallen us, and more than all else, mother, my poor father is dead!"

The Senora Christobal did not start, as Isodor in the full seriousness of a heart full with emotion, told his mother of the death of her husband.

She looked him straight in the face, and while her voice quivered, said:

"I will hear all, my son, for I can bear anything."

Estrella had uttered a slight cry, and then glancing at her mother, had made a great effort, and controlling her emotion, drew her chair to the side of the senora and grasped her hand.

It was a pitiful scene, and a striking one.

The mother and daughter seated there, their hands clasped, their faces deadly pale, and their eyes fixed upon Isodor, who leaned against a column of the piazza and nerved himself to tell all that he had seen in the land he had so lately left.

Leon De Soto was seated near, and his expressive face revealed how deeply he suffered to see the sorrow upon those he loved.

"Mother, I must tell you all, but I pray you do not curb your grief so, for you will only make yourself ill."

"Tell me all, Isodor, I would hear all," was the low reply.

"I left here, mother, as you know, under orders of the Cuban Junta, and when out in the Gulf I met by appointment a schooner loaded with munitions of war, and carrying a Cuban general and some forty companions."

"I took the cargo and Cubans on board, and then had a race with an American cruiser, which tried hard to capture us, but failed."

"Heading for the Cuban coast at a point near Villa Vista, I ran in by night and hid the yacht away in the Lost Lagoon, which you know well, sister, as we have often sailed there together to fish and to hunt along its shores."

"I left the yacht, with orders to Bueno to run out if danger threatened from any Spanish cruisers, and made my way to Villa Vista."

"Alas! our beautiful home I found in ruins, for Colonel Morelos had been there with his Spanish soldiers and laid it in ashes."

"A hound howling dismally some distance off as I stood gazing upon the scene, I called him to my side, and lo! it was my father's pet animal."

"I asked him where his master was, and he led me away from Villa Vista to the home of Leon De Soto."

"I saw a light still in the library, and knocking at the door, the Senor Leon came to the door."

"You may know the welcome he gave me, my mother and sister, for you know all that Leon is."

"I told him where the yacht was, and he went with me to the lagoon, told the general that I would not return until the next night, and then I went back to the De Soto plantation."

"From the Senor Leon I heard how Colonel Morelos had learned from a traitor the names of our secret leaders, our hiding-places for arms, and all, and had seized upon my father and twelve other chiefs."

"The name of the Senor Leon was also down upon the dread list, but you recall that he once saved the life of Colonel Morelos in Havana, and he was not arrested, owing it to the Spanish Butcher that he was not, and whom I did not believe held one atom of gratitude or mercy in his heart."

"Disguised by the Senor Leon, in his dress as a student, and with a false beard, I drove with him to the town, for he told me that Morelos intended to make an example of the Cuban Insurgent leaders."

"Your father among them?" said the Senora Christobal with strange calmness.

"Yes, mother, father and twelve others."

"The Cubans had been ordered to the town to witness the execution, the Spanish soldiers were already drawn up upon the plaza when we arrived, and soon after the doomed men and their guard arrived, headed by the head-quarter band playing a dirge."

"Colonel Morelos and his staff also appeared upon the scene and all was ready for the execution."

Estrella groaned, but her mother did not move, or take her eyes off of her son's face, and, with an effort controlling his emotion, he continued:

"I sat in the carriage, in full view of my father, and his fellow Patriots, and my heart thrilled with pride to see that the Spaniards could not force from them even a look of dread."

"Leaving the carriage, the Senor Leon daring-

ly made his way to Colonel Morelos, and demanded of him, in return for the services he had done him, that he might bid his friends goodbye.

"Morelos granted the demand, and Senor Leon passed along the line, saying farewell to all, and coming last to my father.

"To him he said that you and Estrella were comfortably settled in America, and that I was there but a few paces distant, in disguise.

"I saw my father's eyes turn toward me, and knew that, in spite of my disguise, he recognized me.

"Then Senor Leon pressed my father's hand in a long farewell and turning away returned to me."

The senora stretched forth her hands here for that of the young Cuban, and grasping it in both her own she pressed her lips to it ere he could withdraw it.

"She spoke no word, but the act was deeply touching, and tears came into the eyes of Leon De Soto, while Isodor hastily continued, as his self-possession seemed failing him.

"Mother, need I say that my father died, the brave man that he was?

"Need I say that it was Colonel Morelos that was his murderer, and that he made him the victim of his revenge, because my sister would not become his wife?

"Need I say that I registered a vow to have revenge, oh how bitter a revenge, upon Morelos and his Spaniards, for the work that I saw them do?

"You know all this, so I will only say that I drove with the Senor De Soto hastily from the scene, and on the way our carriage ran over one whom both you and sister knew.

"It was the strange girl, Fanita Fuentes, who dwells with her old father, the Hermit Sailor, in the mountains on the coast.

"It was her fault that she was thrown beneath the horses' feet and severely hurt; but we carried her to her home, calling on the way to the doctor to accompany us, and he pronounced her not fatally injured.

"But she called me to her and told me that she loved Rafael Ramirez, who had belonged to our league, turned traitor, and been executed, and in revenge she had told all that she knew of the insurgent movement, and caused the death of the leaders, for she had believed father to have ordered the execution of her lover.

"It was a strange fatality that she nearly lost her life under the feet of the horses which were drawing the son of the man she had aided to murder.

"I uttered no word against her though, but returned with Senor Leon to his home, and that night he went with me to the yacht and we set sail, for General Lopez had failed in his expedition, and, for the present the cause of Cuba is lost.

"On our way out we were chased by the Spanish brig-of-war El Moro, and she followed us, in spite of a severe hurricane, to the American coast, where I wrecked the Cloud upon the Chandeleur Islands, rather than that she should fall into the hands of the Spaniards.

"They followed us ashore, and we beat them back, and I took from the guest of the brig's commander, who was none other than Atares, The Butcher of Cubans, the Diamond Cutlass which had been presented to him for his red deeds.

"That sword I have with me, and the general has named me, in honor of this capture, Captain Cutlass.

"Escaping from the island, we made our way in boats to the lake-shore, and thence to New Orleans.

"Now, mother, I have told you all."

As Isodor spoke the last words he sprung forward and caught his mother in his arms, for she had attempted to rise, and had fallen forward like one in a faint.

Tenderly she was borne to her room, and a physician was sent for in all haste; but he came too late, for the Angel of Death had already called the spirit of the broken-hearted woman away.

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT EXPEDITION.

SOME months after the death of the Senora Christobal, a small sloop-yacht was standing in toward the Cuban coast, just as the shadows of night were falling upon the waters.

The island was yet several leagues away, and under a five-knot breeze the yacht was making fair headway, her jib and mainsail being alone set, as though her skipper was in no hurry.

That personage sat upon the deck, his eyes

fixed upon the distant shores with a sad, wistful look, while his mouth was sternly set.

Near him sat a young man, with a dark, handsome face, who, with the skipper are well known to the reader, for they are none other than Isodor Christobal and Leon De Soto.

The craft was a trim American yacht, sloop rig, of some thirty tons burden, and with a crew of half a dozen negroes, one of whom was at the helm, while the others were forward, also gazing intently upon the Cuban shores they were approaching.

The one at the tiller was Bueno, with the same happy, fearless face, full of character, which never varied in danger or sorrow.

"Leon, I see the white walls of dear old Villa Vista now," said Isodor, who was looking through his glass.

"Yes, so do I, and they will long stand as a grand old ruin—a remembrance of Spanish vandalism and mercilessness," was the reply of Leon De Soto, as he turned his glass upon the far-away ruined walls of the once beautiful home of the Christobals.

"Leon, you will not do as I ask you—urge your parents and sister to return with me to-night and seek a home in free America?"

"No, Isodor, I cannot, much as I would have them do so.

"My parents are getting old; they have known but the one home in all their lives, for both were born on the plantation, and, as you know, were cousins.

"They would seldom go to Havana, and to get them to leave their anchorage now I believe would break their hearts.

"Besides, I do not believe the Revolution will again break out for a year, and in that time, by being upon the spot, I can see what it is best for them to do."

"You will be in great danger yourself, Leon, as you know the Spaniards are most vigilant, our latest reports say."

"True, but Morelos commands all of the Department where I will be in secret service, and he will not harm me, I think."

"Do not trust him too far."

"I will not, Isodor, for I know that he is a cunning fox as well as a tiger; but I shall not allow our cause to suffer from fear of personal harm."

"Leon, I fear you are a trifle reckless, and I think I guess the cause."

"Well, Isodor?"

"You left Cuba with me in the hope that, seeing my sister away from home, she might be influenced to change her mind.

"You have again offered yourself, and she has refused you?"

"Yes, Isodor, the senorita is my friend, and that is all; but I do not yet give up hope that I may win a name some day, and she may yet change her mind."

"It is not that, Leon, for if you were the chief of a Cuban army it could not cause her to regard you more highly than she does; but the fact is, sister once met one who saved us from a sinking vessel, gallantly coming to our rescue in his yacht, and himself steering the boat that took us off, and she has never forgotten him."

"He was an American, I believe?"

"Yes, a young planter on the Mississippi, and a yachtsman, cruising for pleasure in the Gulf when he aided us."

"You know his name?"

"Yes, it was Crittenden, and he had been an officer in the war between the United States and Mexico; but, resigning from the service, he had devoted himself to a life of travel."

Leon De Soto sighed, for he would have given worlds to have been the favored American.

Then he asked:

"Will you tell me, Isodor, if the Senorita Estrella is engaged to this young American?"

"No, for she has not seen him since he took us to Villa Vista in his yacht after rescuing us from the sinking packet."

"Well, Isodor, I shall try to win a name in our next struggle that will make the senorita proud of me as a friend; but tell me, when do you think General Lopez will be ready to strike a second blow?"

"He told me that as soon as the hiding-places upon the coast were decided upon, where to place the arms and where to make the landings, I could begin my work."

"Your new yacht will be completed by that time?"

"Yes, and in her I risk my all; for with what money we had in America, through father's foresight, I purchased the home for Estrella, and placed at interest her share, while the balance I devoted to chartering this craft for the purpose I have in hand, and building my new yacht."

"You have done most nobly, Isodor, and though not yet seventeen, few men are your equal. But we are nearing the shore rapidly now, as the wind increases, and I sincerely hope that nothing will arise to thwart your purpose to-night."

"I will carry out my plans if it can be done, and woe unto him who stands between," was the stern rejoinder of the youth, who then turned to the negro helmsman, and said:

"Run into the Black Lagoon, Bueno, for I am sure the Spaniards will not have a guard there on the watch."

"Yes, Senor Master," was the reply of the negro helmsman, and an hour after the little sloop glided into an opening in the high shores, where a lagoon emptied its inky waters into the Gulf.

The lagoon was not very wide, hardly more than sixty feet at its mouth, and the banks were high and precipitous, while they were fringed with trees and shrubbery, presenting a barrier that could not be scaled, or even seen through.

Dropping anchor, in a darkness that could be almost felt, there in that retreat, the boat was launched, and with six of the slaves at the oars, Bueno at the tiller, and Isodor and Leon De Soto seated aft, they pulled out of the hiding-place leaving the craft without a soul on board.

Turning down the coast they moved slowly along with muffled oars for a mile or more, when the boat was headed into a small bay.

It was the Villa Vista harbor; but the pier had been destroyed, the ruins of the mansion loomed up in dismal solitude, and upon all rested an air of desolation that was painful.

Mooring the boat in the shadow of the wrecked pier, Isodor sprung ashore, followed by De Soto and the negroes, the latter carrying a handbarrow, spades and shovels.

Past the ruined villa they made, disturbing some night birds that were roosting there, on up through the negro quarter, and thence by the weed-grown plantation road toward the town.

It was a walk of two leagues, but coming in sight of a glimmering light they halted, while De Soto left them, walking rapidly away alone.

He wended his way rapidly along toward the light, and soon came in sight of a handsome mansion situated in a park of pine trees.

A dog sprung toward him, but a word quieted the savage bark into a low whine of pleasure, and the animal kept at his heels as he ascended to the piazza and entered the house.

In a large sitting-room there were three persons, an old gentleman and lady, whose hair was turning white, and a young girl of thirteen as beautiful as a fairy.

At sight of Leon De Soto the young girl, who was reading aloud, uttered a cry of delighted surprise, and sprung into his arms.

"Brother!—oh, brother!"

"My son! Home at last!"

Such were the cries of delight that greeted the wanderer home, and in a few words Leon De Soto told how he had landed from a vessel that had touched at the island, and had been sorry to remain away so long, but had been detained, as he had written them, far beyond the time he had expected to stay.

"We received your letter, my dear son, and were glad you were not here, for poor Cuba has suffered greatly, though Colonel Morelos is our friend," said the Senor De Soto.

"Father, Cuba has indeed suffered; but now that the trouble is over, and the Insurgent leaders have been executed, I hope a time of quiet will come."

"Poor Don Christobal!" said Ninez De Soto, sadly.

"Ah! sister, he was not the only victim, as the senora, his beautiful wife, died under the shock of knowing his fate," answered Leon.

"And the Senorita Estrella, and Isodor?" asked Ninez.

"They feel deeply the sorrow put upon them, but are well, and America is their home now; but let me go to my room and make myself presentable, and you, sis, come with me, please, and order me some supper," and telling his aged parents that he would soon return, Leon De Soto left the room.

"Little sister, can you keep a secret?" he asked, when they were alone together.

"Try me, brother Leon," was the quick answer.

"Where is Don Christobal buried?"

"In the Arbor woods, outside of the San Jose Cemetery, where the Festivals are held."

"Good! are the graves marked?"

"Yes; stones have been placed at the head of each, by order of Colonel Morelos, and, oh! brother Leon! the inscriptions thereon are most cruel!"

"It is like that wretch!—but never mind; I must not lose my temper; but now, Ninez, you must do something for me."

"I am ready, brother."

"You know the gate that leads into the Christobal plantation from our land?"

"Oh, yes."

"Are you afraid to go there alone?"

"To-night?"

"Yes—now."

"Not if you wish it."

"I ask it; but first order me some supper, and then, while I am making my toilet in my room, run out to the Christobal gate; but let none of the slaves see you, and depart by the front door."

"Yes, brother."

"You will find there Isodor Chris—"

"Oh, brother!"

"Sh! His life would be the forfeit if it were known."

"No one shall know, brother."

"Tell him where his father is buried, Ninez, that is all, and return quickly to the house, for I shall not go into the sitting-room until you get back, and I dare not go myself, as I might be missed by my parents and an alarm follow, while if they call you, I will say you are here with me."

"Isodor is waiting you, for I said you should come, if you were here; but be cautious."

"Don't fear that I will not, brother," and Ninez hastily threw a mantilla over her head and left the mansion upon her errand, calling the dog that had greeted her brother to accompany her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INSURGENT'S GRAVE.

At a rapid pace, Ninez De Soto walked through the woodland, the faithful dog trotting close to her heels.

She flanked the servants' quarters, glided from tree to tree, and was soon in the roadway leading to the Christobal plantation.

She did not expect to meet any one there, for the superstitious negroes, since the execution of the Don and the burning of the villa, never went in that direction after nightfall.

Then too the road led by the Christobal cemetery, and that too the negroes shunned with great care, for rumors were afloat in the slave quarters, that the Don's ghost had been seen prowling about his deserted plantation and seemingly wishing to be laid at rest in the burying-ground of his family.

A walk of half a mile brought her in sight of the white posts of the gate, leading from the woodland, and the dog gave a low growl.

"Silence sir! don't you dare to bark here!" cried Ninez.

A moment after she gave a low call, and instantly it was answered by a dark form appearing from a thicket.

"Oh, Senor Isodor!" and the little maiden sprung toward him.

"Ninez! this is indeed a noble act upon your part," and the youth grasped the girl's hands fondly in both his own.

"Oh, Senor Isodor, how my heart feels for you in all your sorrow," cried Ninez.

"I know it, Ninez, and I have often thought of you, and asked Senor Leon to let you come, if he could not return, for I so longed to see you for we were always great friends."

"And always will be, Senor Isodor; but what a hero you have become, for it all came out how you executed Rafael Ramirez, that bad man, for turning traitor, and killed Captain Merida in a duel, and took your mother and sister away in your yacht."

"You have become a great man, Senor Isodor, and I am proud of you."

"I hope to make you more so some day, sweet Ninez; but now I must hasten on my way, as soon as you have told me where my poor father lies buried."

In a few words the young girl told him of the burial-place of his father, as she had made it known to her brother, and then the two parted, Ninez returning to the mansion with her dumb companion, and unseen, entering her brother's room to tell him all, while Isodor went on his way, over hill, field and dale, toward the San Jose Chapel Cemetery, which he knew well.

He dared not take a road, for he expected to be seen by some band of Spaniards, or even Cubans, and it was a long, hard tramp for him and his faithful comrades.

At last, just as the chapel clock tolled the hour of midnight, he sprung over the adobe wall into the cemetery.

Crossing it, the party soon found themselves

in the open woodland, where Colonel Morelos had had the Insurgent leaders buried, that they might, after death, be a warning to Cubans, through their graves, upon the headstones of which he had had inscriptions cut to suit his own views.

The woodland was often the resort of gatherings of the people, and Colonel Morelos knew that the graves would be seen there by thousands.

The night was starlight, but following the directions of Ninez De Soto, the youth soon came in sight of the thirteen headstones.

Lighting a match he ran its blaze along until he came to a grave at the end of the line.

It was the one that he sought, and down by its side he knelt, while his black companions stood with uncovered heads near by.

"My poor, murdered father! you shall be cruelly avenged."

"I swear it, here by the dishonored grave into which Spanish inhumanity has placed you!"

Then he lighted another match, and read the inscription cut deep into the stone.

It read:

"BENEATH THIS STONE

"IN A

"DISHONORED GRAVE

"LIES THE BODY OF

"DON PIEDRA CRISTOBAL.

"Once an honored officer of the Spanish army, he resigned his commission to return to Cuba and plot rebellion against his queen; but caught in his treachery, he was tried, convicted and

"SENTENCED TO DEATH BY THE GARROTE.

"PUT TO DEATH, WITH

"TWELVE OTHER INSURGENT CHIEFS,

"OCTOBER —, 1849.

"Let the fate of Christobal, the Insurgent, and his brother traitors be a warning to all Cubans who would turn against Spain, their mother country."

Several times did Isodor Christobal read over this strange inscription, by the aid of lighted matches, until the words were engraved indelibly in his heart.

Then he arose and said:

"Begin work, boys!"

Instantly two of the crew stepped forward and struck their spades into the grave.

Quickly they throw out the yielding earth, until becoming tired, two others relieve them at their work, and thus alternating, half an hour passes away when a shovel strikes a hard substance.

"It is the coffin, Senor Master," said Bueno.

Isodor started and stepped nearer, and soon the earth was thrown out to the coffin, about which ropes were fastened, and slowly it was raised from its loathsome resting-place.

The hand-barrow was then placed near, the coffin was put upon it, blankets thrown over it, and the spades and shovels dropped into the grave to lessen the weight upon the return.

"Now, boys, we must return, and it is so late I think we can venture back by the road."

"Let every man speak out as he gets tired, and thus relieving each other we can go on without halting long."

The barrow was raised upon the shoulders of four of the slaves, two others took their position, one upon either side, Bueno brought up the rear and Isodor led the way.

Crossing the cemetery, they scaled the adobe wall into the road and walked at a swinging pace, a man stepping in from time to time and relieving a tired comrade at the barrow, Isodor and Bueno also taking their turns.

Thus a league was gone, half the distance to their boat, when suddenly out of a gateway, leading into the Ramirez plantation, where had lived Rafael Ramirez, the traitor Cuban, rode two horsemen.

Their manner and the jingling of their accoutrements told that they were Spanish soldiers.

They beheld the strange cortege, as soon as Isodor saw them, and instantly sung out the words, sharp and threatening:

"Halt! what have we there?"

"A dead comrade whom we are bearing home, senors," replied Isodor, stepping to the front, as one of the slaves relieved him at the barrow, which he was bearing when they halted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT FOR THE DEAD.

"Who is it that is dead?" came in the stern tones of the horseman who had hailed Isodor and his party.

"My comrade Piedra," Senor Officer," answered Isodor, referring to his father by his Christian name.

"Where did he die?"

"Back at the tavern, senor."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Chisto, senor."

"Are you a Spaniard?"

"No, senor, a poor Cuban."

"And your companions?"

"Are slaves, senor, whom I urged to bear my poor comrade home."

The Spanish officer turned to his companion and said something in a low tone, to which the other replied in an equally low voice, after which the one who had been making the queries, said:

"There is something strange in your carrying a dead body along the highways after midnight, and I shall hold you here until my companion rides to the Spanish camp, half a mile distant, and brings a guard to turn you over to until you can be investigated, for I believe there is something wrong here."

Then turning to his companion, he continued:

"Fonda, you go to camp and report to Captain Valdez, while I remain as a guard over this party."

"Yes, senor," and the second officer was turning away when Isodor called out:

"One moment, senor!"

The youth saw that he must act and promptly, did he wish to save his father's body from being retaken, and the lives of himself and faithful crew.

"Well?" and the Spaniard turned back.

"Do you go to the camp at the town?"

"No."

"I thought if you did, you might ask Padre Carmichael of San Jose Chapel if it was not all right."

"I go to our camp over in the edge of the Ramirez woodland."

"I did not know that there was a Spanish camp there."

"Then you must be a stranger in these parts, if you do not know where our camps are located, since you accused Cubans began your uprising, causing us to leave pleasant quarters for field life."

"Senor, I am a stranger here, and I have deceived you; but if you will allow me to whisper to you, I will tell you something of great interest."

"Hold on, Fonda, before you go, and I'll hear what he has to say," and the Spaniard rode forward a few steps, when Isodor, as he bent over in his saddle, seized him with an unexpected grasp and dragged him headlong to the earth.

"Hold him, Bueno!" cried the youth, and he sprung forward to grasp the rein of the other horseman, who suddenly drew a pistol and fired, while he attempted to dart away.

The shot missed its aim, however, and, in another instant the Spaniard would have been off, when Isodor fired, and the man, uttering a cry fell headlong from his saddle.

In the mean time Bueno had sprung upon the Spaniard, whom his young master had dragged to the ground, and, with the aid of two others of the crowd had bound him securely.

"We've got him safe, senor," cried Bueno.

"And this one is dead; but hark!"

As Isodor spoke, the notes of a distant bugle was heard.

"It is in the Spanish camp, and sounding the alarm."

"Quick, Bueno, gag him, and tie him so he cannot escape."

"Better kill him, Senor Master," muttered Bueno.

"No, Bueno, I will not strike even a Spaniard when he is down, or wholly in my power."

"There, that will do; now let us be off!"

The Spaniard was thrown to one side of the road, and again raising the barrow, the party started on their way at a quick walk.

It was yet several miles to the coast, and the bugles sounding the alarm were ringing through the Spanish camp.

"It is a cavalry encampment, Bueno, so it will not take them long to get here," said Isodor.

"The pistol-shots alarmed them, senor, for I guess Spaniards are scared of their shadows, since the uprising in the island."

"They'll be more frightened yet, Bueno, if all goes well; but we must leave the highway at the next plantation-gate and take to the fields, and they cannot find us so easily as they may think, for the darkness is in our favor."

There was a gateway a short distance ahead, and into this they turned, just as they heard the sound of galloping hoofs.

"They are coming up the road, and will soon run upon those Spaniards," said Isodor.

"Wish we had left the live one in the middle of the road to be run over," muttered Bueno.

"Well, we have a fair start, and we will have to beat them off if they do overtake us," and Isodor sprang to the barrow to relieve one of the negroes, and urged them on at a still faster pace.

Loud voices in the distance reached their ears, and told them that the party had reached the spot where lay the dead and the bound Spaniard.

Then came a ringing alarm on a bugle, shouts and angry voices, and as the fugitives ran down into a vale they heard no more of the sounds behind them.

Thus the retreat was kept up, the dead body of the Insurgent Don growing heavier and heavier to the tired fugitives.

But, panting, struggling, they kept on their way, and at last the walls of the ruined villa came in sight.

"Five minutes more, boys, and we reach our boat," cried Isodor, and the men struggled on.

But, as the waters of the bay caught their eyes, the sound of hoofs was heard, and into sight dashed a party of horsemen.

"There are a dozen of them."

"My rifle, Bueno, and you press on, get the body in the boat, and all ready for me to run, after I fire, and jump on board," and Isodor spoke with the utmost calmness.

"The boys can do that, Senor Master, and two rifles are better than one," and the faithful Bueno took from the barrow, where they had been carried, his own and his master's rifles, while the crew pressed on down toward the beach.

"Now, Bueno, it will be sweet revenge to kill a Spaniard on my own grounds, in sight of my ruined home, and while defending the dead body of my murdered father."

"Fire!" and with the last word the two rifles flashed, the Spaniards not being much over a hundred yards distant, and coming at a gallop down toward the shore, for they had caught sight of the fugitives.

With the crack of the rifles a Spaniard dropped from his saddle, and a horse went down with his rider, momentarily checking the advance of the troopers.

"Run for your life, Bueno!" cried Isodor, and the two bounded away like deers.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOUBLE CHASE.

THE well-aimed shots of Isodor Christobal and Bueno, had the effect of checking the advance of the Spanish troop.

The fire had been delivered from behind a fancy mound, upon which grew ornamental trees, and its shelter enabled the youth and the negro to fly at full speed without being seen.

Arriving at the shore, they found that the coffin was already in the boat, the men at their oars and all ready to row away.

"Give them another shot, Bueno," cried Isodor, and as the Spaniards were again advancing they once more received a check.

The were cavalry, so had only their revolvers, and fired them in response, the bullets falling short, however.

Springing into the boat, while Bueno took the helm, Isodor reloaded the rifles.

The oarsmen dashed their blades into the water, and the large yawl moved slowly off, for it was a cumbersome affair.

The Spaniards now dashed down to the water's edge and opened with their pistols, which fire Isodor returned with cool and steady aim.

"They have a craft near, so ride with all speed to where the El Moro lies at anchor and order her in chase."

Such was the loud command of the Spanish officer, and it reached the ears of the fugitives.

Isodor knew that the little seaport two leagues up the coast, was a favorite anchorage for Spanish cruisers, and he did not doubt but that his old enemy, the El Moro was then there, so he said quickly:

"Pull hard, boys, for we must get away before the fleet El Moro is after us, and it will not be two hours before she is."

The black crew bent to their oars with terrible energy, and the large yawl went rapidly along.

It was a long row to the lagoon, where the yacht had been left; but it was reached at last, and the coffin was lifted aboard; a hole was knocked in the boat, to sink her, as they had a small skiff at the stern davits, and dared not take time to drag the yawl upon the deck.

The wind was not very strong, and it seemed

as though they made but little headway: but Isodor congratulated himself upon the fact that the Spanish brig had no better breeze than he did.

At last the island was left a league astern, and the crew of the yacht breathed more freely.

While Bueno had the tiller, Isodor ordered the men to put the coffin containing his father's body in the hold.

A box had been prepared for it there, and it was soon tightly closed, the hatch let down, and then the youth told the men to get what rest they could, and the tired fellows threw themselves down to sleep upon the deck.

Walking aft, Isodor offered to relieve Bueno at the tiller, but the faithful negro said he was not in the least tired, and added:

"Better keep your glass up toward the port, Senor Master, for the El Moro must be coming by this time."

"If she is, we can do no more than we have, Bueno, as we have all sail set that will draw."

"The wind will come up heavier, senor, with the sunrise."

"I hope so, for, if we get out of the neighborhood of Cuba, we can raise the American flag, as this is a United States pleasure craft, and even the Spaniards will not dare touch us upon the high seas."

Bueno shook his head dubiously.

"You think that they will?"

"If we are dead, Senor Master, and this yacht is sunk, who can tell what has become of us?"

"True, and Spaniards will do anything. Ha! I see the brig!" and Isodor seized his glass and leveled it upon the object that had caught his eye.

The white sail of a vessel was just discernible against the dark background of the island, and turning his glass upon it, he said:

"It is a *goleta* rig, not the El Moro; but she is crowded with sail and is heading after us."

"Guess the El Moro was not in port, senor."

"So I think, and they have sent a cutter in chase, or gotten some craft to come."

"I ain't so afraid if it is not the El Moro, as the sloop is pretty fast, senor."

"Yes, and will hold her own pretty well in light weather; but we have a full league or more the start, and it will be a long chase, I hope."

Anxiously the two now watched the coming vessel, while the sloop held on her way at a four-knot rate, with all sail set.

As the eastern skies grew gray with approaching dawn, the wind increased in strength, but, coming from astern, the stranger got it first and came bowling merrily along in chase.

The sloop careened gracefully to the breeze, the waters rippled under her bow and left a feathery wake, so that the chase became more exciting.

"Sail ho!" suddenly cried Isodor, who had been glaring about the sea in the uncertain light.

"It's a schooner, senor, and so trim she looks to be one of those pretty American yachts," said Bueno, as the light grew brighter, and enabled them to see the strange sail distinctly.

"I wish we had discovered her sooner, so that we could have run for her; but, as it is, she is now in a position that puts the Spaniard between us."

"I will hoist the American flag though," and Isodor ran up to the peak the stars and stripes.

It was now full daylight, and the black crew had arisen from their nap, and were gazing with interest upon the scene.

Seeing dirt-marks upon the deck, they set to work to clean up and put the sloop in perfect trim, while the negro cook calmly prepared breakfast, as his own appetite had told him that it would be most acceptable to all.

The craft in chase was now seen to be a Cuban pleasure vessel, doubtless belonging to some wealthy planter.

She was about sixty tons burden, graceful as a swan, carried a large spread of canvas, and was running along at a pace that threatened to overhaul the sloop by noon.

Turning his glass upon her the youth saw that her decks were crowded, and a closer inspection proved to him that she was manned with Spanish sailors.

"Bueno!"

"Senor Master?"

"The crew of that craft were taken from some Spanish vessel-of-war, perhaps the El Moro, that could not come in pursuit of us."

"Yes, senor."

"There are some thirty on board, as well as I am able to count them, and if I mistake not I recognize the tall form of Lieutenant De Garmo of the El Moro."

"It may be that the El Moro was in port, un-

dergoing repairs, Senor Master, so threw some of her crew on board the *goleta*."

"That is doubtless the case, and De Garmo is as cruel a wretch as is in the Spanish service; but see, the American is brightening up," and Isodor pointed to the other vessel, which was now spreading sail, as it had been cruising slowly along under jib and mainsail only.

It was certainly a yacht, from her build, for she was as clean-cut in rig and hull as a New York pilot-boat, and carried a large spread of canvas.

Some seventy tons in size, she was painted white, and a narrow red belt around her hull from cut-water to rudder post.

"I see an officer upon her deck, evidently eyeing us closely, so I'll see what effect a signal of distress will have, for the *goleta* will overhaul us, Bueno."

"Certain, master."

Seizing the halyards Isodor drew down the flag, reversed it, Union down, and ran it up to a half-mast.

The effect was almost electrical upon the stranger, for up to his peak went the stars and stripes, a small cannon pealed forth a reply, the bows swept around, and sail was crowded on rapidly as the yacht came on in pursuit.

A wild cheer of delight burst from Isodor's lips, and was echoed by his crew, at the sight of this determination of the American to see what meant the American flag in distress on board the sloop.

The gun from the American vessel seemed also to startle those on the *goleta*, for all eyes were turned upon her, and it was evident that they saw the sloop had some one to protect her.

But the *goleta* held swiftly upon her way, and the wind having increased to a steady seven-knot blow, the three vessels went along at a lively pace, forming a pretty picture, but an exciting one.

"The *goleta* gains on us rapidly, Bueno," said Isodor.

"Yes, master, but the American gains more rapidly upon the Spaniard," replied Bueno.

"See, the *goleta* has a small gun forward and is going to open fire upon us," and, as Isodor spoke a puff of smoke burst from the bows of the Spaniard, and a shot came flying along toward the sloop.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN AMERICAN YACHTSMAN.

THE chase, now resolved into a double chase, was growing more and more exciting to all on board the three pretty vessels flying over the blue waters of the Gulf.

The sloop was crowded with canvas, the wind was fresh and steady, and laying well over to her work, she was driving along at a rapid pace.

One mile astern came the Cuban *goleta* with her strange West Indian rig.

She, too, carried all her sails, and was forging through the water at a speed that caused her to gain steadily upon the sloop.

A mile astern of the *goleta* came the American yacht, with topsails, jib, main and foresails set, and she carried a bone in her teeth with a will, as she rushed on to have a hand in the race, chase, or whatever it might turn out to be.

At the helm of the sloop was Bueno, calm and skillful, watching every chance to aid his vessel, while Isodor passed to and fro near by, his glass in his hand, and the crew were forward, anxiously watching the vessels astern.

At the peak of the fugitive sloop the American colors were flying at half-mast, and Union down, a sure signal of distress.

On the quarter-deck of the *goleta* were two officers, one in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Spanish navy, and a tall, broad-shouldered, stern-faced man.

The other was an officer of Spanish marines, and the two were earnestly talking together.

A midshipman was forward, clearing a small twelve-pounder brass gun for action, and a crew of twenty seamen and a dozen marines comprised the rest of the force on the *goleta*, which was a pleasure craft, as Isodor had surmised, taken by the lieutenant and a complement of men from El Moro to go in chase of the sloop.

Upon the deck of the American were about twenty souls.

A huge negro, in neat white cap and apron, was preparing breakfast, while a couple of colored stewards were bustling in and out of the cabin with dishes and table linen.

Forward a crew of a dozen men were leaning over the bulwarks, gazing at the two vessels ahead with deep interest.

They wore white duck trousers, white shirts

trimmed with blue, snowy tarpaulins, and a red sash about their waists.

Aft on the quarter-deck, besides the two men at the wheel, were three persons.

One of them, a young man with a sun-browned face and white uniform, was evidently an officer, for he carried a glass in his hand, and occasionally issued some order.

The other two were also young men, one in a blue flannel civilian's suit, the other in a white flannel undress uniform, duck naval cap, and the air of one who was master there.

His form was erect, commanding and athletic, while his face was frank, fearless to recklessness, cheery and full of intelligence.

"Hello, Field, the *goleta* is preparing to fire upon the chase, so we must take the muzzles off of our little terriers," cried the young man above described, as he saw through his glass that the Spaniard was preparing to fire.

"Do you mean, Duke, that you would fire upon the Spanish flag, without knowing what the fugitive craft is or has done?" asked the young gentleman in the blue flannel suit.

"My dear Newton, I would fire upon any flag that turned its guns upon a vessel that floats the stars and stripes, Union down, as a signal of distress," was the ready response.

"But the Spaniard may be right."

"It matters not, for we can settle that afterward; but he shall not run down the American flag, if I can help it, and if that sloop can show correct papers, the Spaniard has got to let go or fight to keep her. Come, Scott, are you not going to give us any breakfast to-day?" and the young yachtsman turned to one of the negro stewards, who was more interested in the chase than his duties.

"Ready right away, Massa Duke," was the reply, and ten minutes after the yachtsman and his guest, Ned Newton, sat down to a delicious repast in the luxuriously-furnished cabin of the Red Belt.

Before they were quite through their breakfast, a heavy gun was heard in the distance.

Ned Newton sprung to his feet, but his host said quietly:

"Sit down, Ned, and finish eating."

"Ho, on deck, there!"

"Ay, ay, captain," and the young sailor before described looked down the companionway.

"Any damage done to the sloop, Mr. Field?"

"No, sir, the shot flew wild."

"All right, I will soon be on deck; but keep the Belt doing her best."

"Ay, ay, sir, we are gaining steadily," and the officer returned to his duties, just as a second shot was fired.

After a third and fourth were heard, the yachtsman lighted a cigar and said:

"Come, Ned, now we will see what the Spaniard is about."

Going on deck they found that the practice of the Spanish gunner had improved, for he had sent two shots through the sloop's mainsail; but the schooner was gaining more rapidly upon the *goleta*, than was the latter upon the little chase.

"I'll take the deck, Field, while you get your breakfast," said the yachtsman, and while Melton Field went below, he walked forward and had two small brass sixes cleared for action and ammunition brought on deck.

The crew could hardly be restrained from a cheer, for they knew their young commander meant to protect the sloop at the muzzle of his guns, and they were not at all averse to a brush with the Spaniard, even if he had a larger vessel, heavier guns and double the crew.

The sloop now barely led the Spaniard by a quarter of a mile; and the schooner yacht was not that distance astern of the *goleta*, and gaining rapidly.

"The sloop is fast, Duke, the *goleta* faster and your schooner fastest," said Ned Newton with admiration, as he gazed at the speed of the Red Belt.

"The Spaniard still keeps up his fire on the sloop, you notice, Ned, although he knows that within an hour he will run alongside of him."

"Yes, it seems strange to me that he should do so, Duke."

"Not at all, for that is the Spanish way; but I shall not fire unless I am forced to, and if I am, the Spaniard shall know that I am in deadly earnest."

"There are seven negroes, and one white man on board the sloop, Duke, and all told you have eighteen, making twenty-five, while I count thirty-five on the *goleta*."

"Ten more, so be it, we are Americans on this craft," and the young yachtsman laughed lightly.

"You know I am no coward, Duke," urged Ned Newton.

"No one knows it better than I, old fellow."

"And I only speak so that you'll not get yourself into trouble by a reckless act."

"My dear Ned, I am not reckless, but I am just and humane."

"Yonder sloop flies the stars and stripes as a signal of distress, and if she has a right to it, I shall protect her; but if not, then I must give way."

"But I shall know just what to do when we get to close quarters."

"Which will be within half an hour," said Ned Newton, as he saw that the three vessels were now not a quarter of a mile apart from the sloop to the schooner.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RED BELT AT BAY.

THE half-hour, given by Ned Newton, for the three vessels to get to close quarters was well timed, as the sloop was steadily overhauled by the *goleta*, which kept up its fire upon the little craft, though without doing material damage.

Isodor had quickly gotten his fire-arms upon deck, the crew had placed theirs where they would be ready, and thus the bold little band of fugitives awaited the result, whatever it would be.

The fire of the *goleta* seemed to have no terrors for them, as they did not shrink from the shots.

The Spanish officer had ranged his men ready to board, while the marines were drawn up upon the deck, their muskets in hand.

The yachtsman had also gotten his craft ready for action, for he had armed his men with revolvers and cutlasses, double-shotted his small brass six-pounders, and gathered about him his American tars.

The movements of the Spaniards, seeming to indicate that they meant to fire a volley of musketry upon the crew of the sloop, the young yachtsman suddenly sprung upon the bulwark, and hailed:

"Ho, the *goleta*, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the schooner!" came the response, in broken English.

"That sloop flies the American flag, and she is in your power, so I warn you not to fire upon her!" came in the ringing voice of the yachtsman.

"She is a foe to Spain, an Insurgent craft," was the response.

"That remains to be seen when her papers are looked at."

"Until they are, you fire upon her at your peril, for I warn you that I shall carry you by boarding."

There was no mincing matters in this, no doubt as to the result, but a threat with a firm determination to carry it out.

It dazed the Spaniard, and he gave an order in a low tone to the marines to come to "parade rest."

Then he hailed:

"This *goleta* has on board a crew from the Spanish brig-of-war El Moro, which was undergoing repairs and could not come in pursuit of yonder Insurgent craft."

"I therefore warn you not to interfere with me in the discharge of my duty."

"Order the sloop to lay to, run alongside to starboard, I will come up on the port side, and you and I meet upon the deck of the little bone of contention, and examine her papers."

"If she is an American, I shall protect her, if she is not, then I have nothing to say," and the young yachtsman spoke in Spanish, so that the officer would thoroughly understand.

With a muttered curse, but believing that he would triumph, the Spaniard hailed the little craft, now not half a dozen lengths ahead.

"Ahoy the sloop!"

"Ahoy, the *goleta*!" responded Isodor calmly.

"Come to, so that I can run alongside!"

"Ay, ay," and Isodor gave the order that ran the sloop up into the wind.

Instantly the *goleta* shortened sail to run alongside, and with her sails fluttering, as she ate up into the wind, the schooner came up to port.

Grapnels were thrown by both vessels almost at the same time, and the Spanish officer sprung upon the sloop, his men following.

"Back! send your men back, or I fire!" yelled the yachtsman, and he turned his little six-pounder upon the Spaniards.

"Back to your vessel, men," cried Lieutenant De Garmo, who saw his danger, and they fell back in haste, for they too realized that the American was not one to trifle with.

"Now, Senor Spaniard, we meet on an equal footing," and the yachtsman sprung upon the deck of the sloop, the two meeting amidships.

"Senor, I fear you have gone too far, and that Spain will not brook this insult," said the Spaniard haughtily.

"My dear senor, you have the larger vessel, the heavier guns, the greatest number of men, so resent the insult if you deem you have met with one, or leave it to our Governments to settle," was the cool reply of the American.

"I wish no quarrel, Senor American; but I am in the right, as you shall see, and then I shall demand full reparation."

"It will be time enough to talk of that, Sir Spaniard, when we see who is right, or who wrong."

"Come, young senor, show your right to carry yonder flag at your peak," and the yachtsman turned to Isodor, who now came forward to where the two officers stood.

The young yachtsman started at sight of him, but a warning look from the youth caused him to turn it off quickly with:

"What! is the commander of this craft a boy?"

"Yes, he is a boy and a dangerous one too, for I recognize him, young as he is, as a Cuban Insurgent, the son of the rebel chief, Don Christobal, and in the name of Spain I seize him, his vessel and crew," cried De Garmo excitedly.

"Hands off, Senor Spaniard, until the other side is heard," was the cool remark of the commander of the Red Belt.

"There is no other side, Senor Americano, for I know that boy well."

"He lived in Cuba and belonged to the Insurgent League, of which his father was chief, and he is a very devil in spite of his years, for he challenged Captain Merida, a Spanish officer, to fight a duel, and killed him, and he executed a Cuban who was a traitor to the League, and escaped by night in his yacht with his mother, sister, and these very slaves."

"The story is interesting, senor, for you make a hero of the boy."

"Boy in years, but a man in deeds he is, for we chased him, on the El Moro, and he escaped us, beat us back on an island where he landed, and captured that very sword he wears now from Captain Atares, a Spanish officer; while, only to-night, he landed on our coast for some secret purpose, and in his retreat shot an officer and two men before he gained his sloop."

"You see that I know him, Senor Americano, and have a right to claim him."

"I see nothing of the kind until I hear the other side."

"Speak, young senor, and let me hear what you have to say in your behalf."

And the yachtsman turned to Isodor, who had stood calmly by under the charges of the Spaniard.

"Senor, I am a Cuban born, I admit, but I have a home now in the United States, and I chartered this yacht for a cruise, landed at my old home, my inherited estate, to get the body of my murdered father, and while retreating I was pursued, attacked, and so defended myself."

"Here are the papers of the sloop, and you will see that she is American build, has cleared all right from Mobile for a cruise in the Gulf, and has broken no law."

The yachtsman took the papers, glanced over them, nodded his head with a smile, and handed them to the Spaniard with the remark:

"Senor, the other side has been heard from, and you cannot go behind the record."

"I shall seize the sloop and her crew, for these papers are forged!" shouted the Spaniard.

"Senor Lieutenant, let me urge you to do no such silly thing, for my Government will not put up with an insult to her flag, and I, as an American, will not permit it."

"You dare not attempt to stay me."

"Now, if that is really your opinion, the sooner you undeceive yourself the better."

"Shall we begin now to see which shall be the victor?"

There was something in the calm mien of the American that held the irate Spaniard in check.

He was not certain that he could get the best of him, and a glance at his crew showed that they seemed really anxious for the fray, while his own were not.

The papers of the sloop he knew were right, and did he bring on an action, he feared that his Government might not uphold him.

Had he captured the sloop in Cuban waters it would be different; but here he was thirty miles from the island, flying the American flag, and with an American yachtsman to take her part.

He seemed nervous, ill at ease, irate and savage.

Turning to the officer of marines he called to him to approach, while he said:

"You may call one of your officers, senor, as an offset."

"My dear senor, I do not deem it necessary, for I am fully capable of taking care of myself," was the cool response, and the Spaniard bit his lips in vexation.

Then, as the marine officer approached, he told him fully the situation of affairs, and asked his advice.

"The papers are American, Senor De Garmo; the American flag flies over her, this gentleman seems to be determined to protect her, and rather than complicate affairs between Spain and the United States, I would say let the sloop go, and have our Government make a demand for this Insurgent youth."

"Your Government can spare itself the mortification of a refusal, for the United States will never give up one who seeks the protection of her flag legitimately, senor," said the yachtsman.

"We must yield, Senor Americano, I fear," said De Garmo.

"Do it gracefully, then, senors, and come on board my yacht with me to join me in a glass of wine."

The Spaniards bowed, accepted the invitation, and half an hour after the *goleta* was returning to Cuba, while the sloop held on her way toward the American shores, the Red Belt cruising slowly along on a course that would keep her between the Spaniard and his little enemy, for the young yachtsman was determined that there should be no Spanish treachery in the matter, as he feared there might be, should the little craft be left once more to the mercy of Lieutenant De Garmo.

As night came on the *goleta* disappeared from view, and the Red Belt, altering her course, stood away in the wake of the sloop, which had shortened sail, and therefore had not gotten more than three leagues distant from the schooner.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESTRELLA SURPRISED.

LEFT alone in her home in a foreign land, her father lying in his grave in Cuba, her mother buried beneath the magnolias on the shores of Mobile Bay, and her brother—her only protector—away upon his perilous expedition among the Spaniards, Estrella Christobal was certainly to be pitied.

She had the sympathy of the faithful slaves, whom they had brought with them from Villa Vista, and her maid Buenita was her companion and friend, as Bueno to Isodor.

Between Bueno, the American mulatto, and Buenita, the Cuban negress, there existed a devoted attachment, so that the maid could feel for her mistress in the absence of those they loved so dearly on a cruise of such danger.

Prompted by a desire to take his father from a dishonored grave, Isodor had determined to go to Cuba and get his body, and his sister had encouraged him in the idea, hoping that she could go; but this Isodor would not consent to under any circumstances, and the maiden was forced to remain behind.

Isodor had given the model of his former vessel, the Cloud, to a builder in Pensacola, with orders to make her of seventy-five tons burden, and rig her as an American schooner yacht.

Then he had chartered the sloop for his midnight landing upon the Cuban coast, and, bidding Estrella farewell had fearlessly set sail, with a result that the reader already knows.

Had it not been for Buenita, the lot of Estrella would have been almost unbearable; but the faithful maid did all in her power to cheer up her young mistress, urging her to ride out on horseback, row upon the quiet waters, sail her little pleasure boat, and otherwise break the monotony of her life, to take her thoughts off her sorrows.

Daily did Estrella make a pilgrimage to the little burying-ground, in sight of the blue waters, where her mother rested in her grave, and far across the Gulf, at such times, would the thoughts of the grieving girl fly to her father's death and ignominious burial.

Then upon her brother, in his peril her thoughts would turn, and she would feel that life had indeed become an existence of bitterness to her.

In her heart Estrella nursed another sorrow, and that was that the noble young Cuban, Leon De Soto had given her his whole heart, to meet only friendship in return.

She admired De Soto, she really loved him, but not as he wished her to think of him.

She had seen him depart, with his heart bowed down with grief, and it pained her that it was so.

But Estrella's heart was not her own, though the object of her love she had not seen for more than two years, and might never again see.

She recalled how a brave young American

had risked his life to save those who were upon a sinking ship, and had nobly done more than his duty on that fearful night of storm.

She remembered how he had sprung overboard to save her life, where she had been borne off the sinking vessel by a savage wave, and had held her in his strong arms until his boat's crew came to the rescue and picked them up.

Again she remembered the next night, when the American's little vessel was plunging through a rough sea, weighted down by its treble load of shipwrecked humanity, a negro one of the sailors had been struck by the boom in going about, and knocked into the sea, and instantly had the master leaped overboard to save the man.

And save him he did, bearing him up, although he had a broken arm, until aid came to them both.

Was it a wonder that Estrella, thrown with this dashing, handsome young American for two weeks, learned to love him with all her heart?

He spoke her language as he did his own, was her beau ideal of manhood, sung ballads in a rich, sympathetic tenor, and played the piano in the cabin of his yacht with the skill of a master of music, while he had a kind word for all, gave freely to the poor people whom he had taken from the sinking packet, and, with a smile as gentle as a woman's, yet had the courage of a lion and a nerve of iron.

He had promised to come to Villa Vista to see them, but had never done so, and hoping that some day she would meet him again, Estrella Christobal had kept her secret love in her heart.

One afternoon, some three weeks after the departure of Isodor on his dangerous errand, Estrella sat upon the piazza of her little home, gazing down the bay upon the numerous sail in sight.

Suddenly she started, as Buenita came rushing up to her through the yard, and said:

"Sen'rita, Juan says Senor Master's yacht is in sight."

In an instant Estrella was hastening to a little summer-house in the garden, where a view of the bay could be obtained, unobstructed by the trees about the house.

Buenita had gone after her glass, and handing it to her mistress, it was at once leveled upon a distant sail, which Juan, the negro gardener, had recognized as Isodor's sloop.

Coming up at that instant, Juan said:

"It's the sloop of the Senor Master, sen'rita."

"You are right, Juan, and Heaven grant she bears my brother back in safety, and Bueno and the rest of the crew," she added, as she caught the eyes of her maid turned longingly upon the distant sloop.

"Amen, sen'rita," said Juan, while he continued:

"Senor Master is all right, sen'rita, for he can take care of himself where men cannot."

"My brother certainly has a knack of getting out of scrapes," answered Estrella, and turning her glass again upon the sloop, she said, after a moment:

"Juan, do you notice that large schooner leading the sloop?"

"Yes, sen'rita, and she is one of the pleasure craft of these rich Americans, I think."

"And she's fast, too, for she keeps ahead of the sloop with only three sails set, while master has all of his canvas out."

"She is indeed fast, Juan, and seems to be in company with the sloop."

"She does so, sen'rita."

"Do you think she can be an American cutter that has captured the sloop?" asked Estrella, anxiously.

"No, sen'rita, the cutter is up at the town now, for she went by this morning."

"That may be another of these American cutters, so often seen in the Gulf."

"Is she armed, sen'rita?"

"I do not observe any ports, Juan, and there do not seem to be many upon her decks."

"I do hope she is not a vessel-of-war, that has taken the sloop," said Estrella, and she gazed long and earnestly through her glass at the approaching vessels.

Nearer and nearer came the schooner and the sloop, until, leaving the regular channel, the pursuer headed in toward the inlet, where there was an anchorage before the cottage home.

In her wake followed the sloop, and, unable to restrain her anxiety to know all, Estrella, accompanied by Buenita and Juan, hastened from the garden down to the little pier jutting out a hundred feet into the water.

The wind was light, the waters were just rippled gently, but the schooner came on swiftly, and taking in sail rapidly as she approached, drifted, almost, alongside of the end of the

pier, while at the same time three persons leaped ashore.

One of these sprung forward and clasped the maiden in his arms, while he said:

"I am back again, sister mine, and I owe it to this gentleman, whom you will remember served us well once before."

"Captain Crittenden, this is my sister, the Senorita Christobal."

The young American had doffed his cap, and now bent low over the hand that was extended to him, and which trembled in his own like a frightened bird.

Seeing the emotion of his sister, Isodor said quickly:

"And sister, here is another gentleman to welcome, Mr. Edwin Newton, the friend of Captain Duke Crittenden, and I may add my friend too, for he has been most kind to me."

Again did Estrella extend her hand, but her emotion was such that she could utter no word, and leaning her head upon Isodor's shoulder she burst into tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CUBAN JUNTA.

AS soon as Estrella Christobal recovered from her emotion, she controlled herself perfectly, and gave a warm welcome to Captain Duke Crittenden and his friend Ned Newton, inviting them at once to the house as guests of herself and brother.

The invitation was gladly accepted by the yachtsmen, and Captain Crittenden ordered his sailing-master, Melton Field, to go on up to the city with the Red Belt, and have certain repairs done to the vessel, at the same time laying in a supply of needed stores.

As the beautiful yacht sailed away, the sloop came to anchor, and Bueno rowed ashore, when an affectionate greeting was given him by Buenita, for the others were now walking slowly toward the cottage.

Seated upon the veranda that night, Estrella heard from her brother's lips the story of his cruise, and how Captain Crittenden had come to his rescue and driven off the savage Lieutenant De Garmo.

Then Isodor told how he had parted company with the schooner and *goleta*, to be overhauled after nightfall by the former, and Captain Crittenden had come on board the sloop, having recognized the youth the moment he had met him in the presence of the Spaniard.

Begging him to come home with him, the young American had accepted Isodor's invitation.

"And here we are, sister," added the youth.

"Permit me to say, senorita," said Captain Crittenden: "That it was my intention to have visited you ere this, as I intended resigning my commission in the army; but as an Indian war broke out upon the frontier, and my regiment was ordered thither, I dared not offer my resignation in the face of a foe, so served until six months ago, when I was severely wounded and came home."

"My parents having died and left me a handsome fortune, I gave up my commission, senorita, bought the Red Belt, and cruised down the coast from New York, having your home in my mind, for I had seen an account of the cruel murder, for so I must call it, of your noble father, and wished to ascertain what fate had overtaken his family."

"I was within a few leagues of the seaport, near where you told me was your plantation, when I sighted the sloop being chased by the *goleta*."

"With the affair I deemed I had no right to meddle, until I saw the sloop run up the stars and stripes."

"Then I became interested, and when I observed that the flag was hauled down, and then run up again, Union down and at half-mast, I gave chase with the result which your brother has made known to you."

"Of course, after our meeting again, it did not require much persuasion on Isodor's part to get me to visit his home in America, and here I am, senorita, wholly at your service, and tempted to enter sword and fortune, into the cause of Cuba to free itself from the yoke Spain puts upon her colony."

The words of the young yachtsman were received with heartfelt joy by both Estrella and Isodor, and until late in the night, they sat talking over the bitter past, and hoping for brighter days for Cuba in the future.

Isodor also told his sister of his landing on the coast, the midnight march to the burial-place of his father, his short interview with Ninez De Soto, and the flight back to the sloop, fighting against odds.

In the hold of the sloop lay the body of Don Christobal, and Isodor left it to Juan to see that a grave was dug by the side of the last resting-place of his mother, while he rode over to the home of a worthy priest, and asked his services in burying his father, which were at once offered.

The next day, borne by his devoted slaves, and followed by his two children, the young yachtsman and servants of the cottage, and preceded by the priest, the body of Don Christobal, the Insurgent chief, was taken to the little cemetery where lay his wife.

Others saw the little cortege and wondered, but no word was said in explanation, by those who could tell the sad story, in all its strange and bitter happenings, and thus Don Christobal was consigned to the grave with no pomp, and only with the sacred service for the dead read by the worthy priest, who had also buried the Senora Christobal, and taken a strong liking to the beautiful girl and her brave young brother, who were exiles from the land of their birth.

After a visit of a week at "Cuba Cottage," as Isodor had named the little place, Captain Crittenden determined to run over to New Orleans in the Red Belt, as he knew that the young Cuban had received important letters from the *Junta*, which called him there, and had returned the sloop to her owners.

So the Red Belt set sail one afternoon, with Isodor as the guest of Captain Crittenden, Ned Newton having had to return to his home in Tennessee.

The run to New Orleans was without adventure, and after a rapid cruise the Red Belt dropped anchor before the Crescent City, and within a cable's length of a brig-of-war, which Isodor regarded very attentively for awhile and then said:

"That vessel, Captain Crittenden, is the Spanish brig-of-war *El Moro*."

"Indeed! then we will doubtless have a chance to meet some of her officers, and the lieutenant I prevented from taking your sloop, I certainly would like to see again, and discover what his commander thought of his failure to bring you back," and Duke Crittenden regarded the handsome vessel with considerable interest, and then, springing into a boat with Isodor, was rowed ashore, when they took a hack to the St. Charles Hotel, for they intended making their head-quarters there while they were in the city.

Having enjoyed dinner together, Isodor sought the head-quarters of the Cuban *Junta*.

He knew their quarters well, having been there several times before.

The mansion where the Cubans' secret meetings were held was a large, rambling old building in the French part of the city.

It occupied, with the grounds, an entire square, a high wall encircling the yard, and the mansion, a three-storied structure, standing in the center.

There was a front and a rear entrance, through iron gates under a brick arch, and at each was a porter kept, whose language indicated that they were French.

The old house looked almost like a fort, for it had turrets, was strongly built, had narrow windows and few doors.

An iron grating was over each window, and the doors were massive and studded upon the outside with nails.

The place belonged to an eccentric old Frenchman, it was said, who was wont to receive his friends at any time, and always treated them well.

It was to this place that Isodor wended his way, and upon addressing the gate-keeper in French, he was answered in that language.

"Is this the home of Monsieur Le Don?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur," responded the old gateman.

"I would see him."

"Your business, please, monsieur?"

"*Cuba libre*," answered Isodor in a low tone, in Spanish.

"Ah, senor, you are welcome!"

And had any one who believed the gate-keeper a Frenchman heard his Spanish, they would have vowed that it was his native tongue.

Opening the iron gate, which he kept locked, the man bade the youth enter, and directed him to a side door of the mansion, at the same time pulling a bell-cord in his little lodge.

The quick ear of Isodor detected a distant ring, and he went as directed, the door opening as he reached it.

"*Cuba libre*," said a man standing there.

"Ever faithful," responded Isodor.

"*Espanola*," the man said.

"*Cubana*," was the youth's reply.

Seemingly satisfied, the man said:

"Whom would you see, senor?"

"The *Junta*."

"Walk to yonder stairway on the right of the corridor, ascend one flight, and knock thrice on the door on your left."

Isodor obeyed his instructions, which were not new to him, having been there, as I have said, upon several former occasions, and in answer to his knock, the door was opened by the general whom he had taken to Cuba in the *Cloud*, and had been wrecked with him on the island.

"My dear Senor Christobal, I am delighted to see you."

"Come in, for we have been expecting you, and let me make you acquainted with those gentlemen of the *Junta* whom you do not know," and the general ushered the youth into an inner room where sat half a score of dark-faced, serious-looking men, all of whom arose as the general said:

"Senors, this is my young friend, Senor Isodor Christobal, the son of our lamented comrade, Don Christobal, and though a youth in years, you are well aware of his gallant deeds," and as the Cubans one and all grasped his hands, the general continued:

"Why, my brave young captain, not half an hour ago we were reading in the Havana papers, of your daring deed in taking your father's body away from Cuba, and how you were chased to sea, but escaped."

"Do the papers say how I escaped, Senor General?" asked Isodor.

"No, only that you were not taken, and escaped with your father's body, after having killed an officer and several men who pursued you."

"But they do say that the ban of outlawry is upon you, and the sentence of death has been passed upon you as the Boy Insurgent."

"I am glad that they appreciate me so highly," said Isodor, with a sneer.

"Well, Senor Isodor, I asked the *Junta* to write to you, to the address you gave me, that we might see if we could not enlist you in the expedition now forming."

"I am at the service of my country, senors," was the modest reply.

"I know that; but what was your manner of escape from the Spaniards, as your remarks just now lead me to believe that you have something of importance to tell?"

"I have, in that my escape was through the courage of one whose services I beg to offer to you to-night, and no braver, nobler man ever drew sword in defense of any land," and Isodor told of his gallant rescue by Captain Duke Crittenden, his words being received with applause and with great enthusiasm, when he added:

"And now, senors, Captain Crittenden is with me in this city, and offers his sword, his yacht, and ten thousand dollars to the cause of Cuba!"

"Bravo for the noble American!" arose the cry upon all sides, and after a short conversation it was agreed that Isodor should bring Captain Crittenden to the council the following afternoon and present him to the *Junta* and to General Lopez, who was expected in the city the next morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FACE TO FACE.

UPON his return to the hotel, Isodor entered the supper-room, not finding Captain Crittenden, as he had hoped to, and was quietly eating his repast, when he spied his friend at a distant table, along with a party of ladies and gentlemen.

Captain Crittenden's back was toward Isodor, so that he did not see the youth, who would not join him with his friends, as he did not know them.

A moment after three Spanish officers entered in full uniform, and they were shown to the same table with Isodor, being seated immediately opposite.

To his regret Isodor recognized Lieutenant De Garmo, of the *El Moro*, and his companions were also officers of the Spanish brig-of-war.

Could he have retreated unseen, he would have done so, but he had not finished his supper, and he was too proud to depart, after he thought he was recognized.

De Garmo had taken his seat before he saw who it was that faced him, and he started visibly, while he uttered something very like a Spanish oath.

Isodor calmly went on with his supper, while the Spanish lieutenant turned to his companions

and said something in a quick, low tone, which caused them to at once regard the youth.

"Boy, we meet again," said De Garmo fiercely.

"I regret to say that we do, Senor Lieutenant," was the calm response.

"I came very nearly being caused trouble, through my magnanimity in allowing you to go free," hissed the Spaniard.

"Say rather through your fear, for you know not the meaning of the word magnanimous," was the cutting reply.

"Ha! you cast insults in my face," and the Spaniard grew white with rage.

"I did not open the conversation, senor."

"I will make a claim upon the United States Government for you, boy."

Isodor laughed lightly, and the Spaniard said again:

"Were you a man I could force you to face me at sword's length, for your word, and the wrong you have done Spain."

"Dare you ask me to do so, Senor Spaniard, you will find me at your service."

"Bah! you are but a boy."

"I yet hold the belief that I can do a man's work," was the taunting rejoinder.

"Senores, should I allow a boy to insult me?" and De Garmo turned to his companions, both of whom looked unutterable things at Isodor, while one responded:

"He is a Cuban, and has done that for which you should punish him, lieutenant; as Spain cannot reach him."

"By Neptune, you are right, Cardena, and I will."

Then he turned to the youth and said:

"Boy, I consider that you desire to taunt me into challenging you."

"No, Senor De Garmo, I would have remained quiet, but for your attack upon me, and I seek no affair with you here in a strange land; but the time may come when we meet face to face upon equal ground, and then I will not be the one to cry for mercy to a Spaniard."

"Worse and worse! but as I do not wish to challenge a boy, I'll force him to challenge me," and with this Lieutenant De Garmo raised a glass of wine, which a waiter had just poured out for him, and attempted to throw it into Isodor's face.

But, quick as a flash the boy struck up his hand, and the contents went over the uniform of the Spaniard.

"I'll take the insult if so you wish it, senor, without being forced to it," said Isodor quickly, and he was rising from the table, when a clear voice rung out:

"Ha, Isodor, you did that well, while you, Senor Spaniard, are a coward to force a boy into a quarrel with you, that you may assassinate him."

"Take that, sir!"

It was Duke Crittenden who spoke, and, as he uttered the words he struck the Spaniard lightly in the face with his glove.

He had risen, with his friends, from the table, and they were leaving the supper-room when his eyes fell upon Isodor and the company he was in.

Also the words of the youth and the Spaniard reached his ears, and bowing an apology to his friends, he had stepped quickly to the side of the Spanish officer with the above result.

The friends of Crittenden, a couple of waiters, the Spaniards and Isodor were all that were in the supper-room, and the bold act of the dashing young officer fairly dazed the lookers-on.

"Ha! it is you, Sir American?" cried De Garmo, springing to his feet.

"It is I, senor, Duke Crittenden by name, and wholly at your service," was the cool rejoinder.

"Senores, this is the man who protected this Boy Insurgent, when I overhauled him, as you know, upon the high seas, and now he again befriends him," and De Garmo turned with this explanation to his friends, who had also arisen.

"Permit me to offer the explanations," and Crittenden turned to his party, "that you may understand my seeming rudeness."

"This young gentleman is the Senor Isodor Christobal, of whom I told you to-night, and unable to capture and garrote him as a Boy Insurgent, this coward Spaniard seeks to entrap him into a quarrel, that, as I verily believe, he might arrest him, carry him on board his vessel now in port, and take him to Cuba to murder him."

"Do you dare accuse a Spanish officer of such underhand work?" cried one of the officers who accompanied De Garmo.

"My dear senor, I am open to all engage-

ments, so permit me to say that the Spaniards who govern Cuba of late years have proven themselves cowardly assassins from the captain-general down."

The effect of these words seemed to be to fairly stun the Spaniards, and ere they could reply Captain Crittenden continued:

"For this youth I will stand sponsor, as well as for my own words and acts, senors, so permit me to say again that my name is Duke Crittenden, and that at present I am residing at this hotel."

Placing his arm within Isodor's, he drew him away, and, joining his friends, presented the youth to them as they strolled into the parlor, the half-dozen ladies and gentlemen of Captain Crittenden's party being particularly impressed with the handsome, stern-faced young Cuban, and the exciting scenes which they had just witnessed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOUBLE CHALLENGE.

AFTER a pleasant talk in the parlors with his friends, during which his cheery face showed no shadow upon it, Captain Crittenden received a card, which he glanced at and said, pleasantly:

"Come, Isodor, we must go, for a gentleman has called to see me."

The youth at once arose, and after bidding the party farewell, the two friends left the parlor, one of the gentlemen calling out:

"Remember, Crittenden, if there is trouble, you have friends."

"Thank you, Breckenridge, I'll not forget it," was the response, and going to his rooms, Duke Crittenden bade the servant show the visitor up.

Instead of one, two entered, one being an officer who had been with De Garmo at the supper table.

"Be seated, senores, and tell me how I can serve you," the young Kentuckian said in his pleasant way.

Senor Cardena bowed, he having been the sender of the card, and presented his companion, Midshipman Gracias, a young man of twenty whose face bore the impress of a cruel nature.

"Senors, permit me to present my particular friend of whom you have doubtless heard, Senor Christobal de Cuba," and Crittenden enjoyed the wince the Spaniards gave at the introduction, but turned to wait for Cardena to speak.

"Senor Crittenden, you doubtless surmise why I am here?" said Lieutenant Cardena.

"I think I can guess that it is because I slapped the face of your friend De Garmo?"

"It is to demand of you a meeting with my friend, Lieutenant De Garmo!"

"With pleasure I grant it, senor. Time, to-morrow at sunset; place, on board my yacht, which I will run down to an anchorage below the town; weapons, pistols, and distance ten paces."

"Senor Crittenden, why have the meeting upon your yacht?" asked Lieutenant Cardena.

"Duelling is not permissible under our laws, senor; but if you wish to take the chances on shore I am at your service."

"I will report your terms to Lieutenant De Garmo, senor; and now my friend here wishes to have me speak for him on important matters."

"I shall be delighted to hear what the Senor Garcias has to communicate through his friend, Lieutenant Cardena."

"It concerns the Cuban Insurgent here—"

"Hold! speak of my friend only as a gentleman," and Crittenden's eyes flashed fire.

The Spaniard's face colored, while he said:

"My friend, Lieutenant De Garmo, wishing a meeting with you, and with Senor Christobal also, Midshipman Gracias kindly volunteered to serve as his proxy in the affair with the young senor here, they being more equally matched in years."

"Ah! then the Senor Gracias would have a meeting with my friend Christobal, at the same time, about, that I fight Lieutenant De Garmo?"

"Yes, senor, the meeting between Midshipman Gracias and the Senor Christobal to follow yours and Senor De Garmo's."

"What do you say, Isodor?" and Captain Crittenden turned to Isodor, who answered:

"I have no quarrel with Midshipman Gracias but if he wishes to represent Lieutenant De Garmo, I am wholly at his service."

Gracias bowed low, and said:

"Will the Senor Christobal name his weapons?"

"Cutlasses; place on board my yacht, time, after my affair with Lieutenant De Garmo, when I can serve as the second of my friend here," and Crittenden's off-hand manner and words somewhat nonplused the Spaniards, es-

pecially as he had spoken of being Isodor's second after his duel, as though there was no doubt whatever regarding the result to himself.

"If the plan is not satisfactory, Senor Crittenden, I will so notify you," and with a bow the two Spanish officers took their leave.

"We are in for it, Isodor," said Crittenden, when the sound of their retreating footsteps was heard down the corridor.

"I am sorry that I should have drawn you into a quarrel, senor."

"Nonsense! you had a quarrel forced upon you, and those men meant to get you into their power, or at least De Garmo did, while he sent that Midshipman Gracias here to arrange a duel in which he might kill you, as only a short while ago I had in a Spanish paper some accounts of this young man as a phenomenal swordsman and shot."

"I have also heard often of him, senor, and know that he has picked many quarrels with Cubans, some of whom he has killed in duels."

"Yes, I remember now that he has fought a number; but so be it; if he can defeat you he is indeed a prodigy, for I never saw your equal, with sword or pistol, and I am a good judge, as you are the only one I ever found to stand up before my blade, as you have done in the friendly bouts that we have had together."

"But now about your visit to the Junta?"

In a few words Isodor told of his visit, and the appointment for the following evening.

"You must make it the night after, as these duels will prevent our being there to-morrow evening."

"If we go on the yacht?"

"Yes; but if not, and we went on shore, I guess we can be there to-morrow night."

"Now, Isodor, you are a marked man by those Spaniards, the El Moro is in town, the consul is here, to get them spies to dog your steps, and you must remain indoors, unless you go out with me."

"To-morrow, at noon, we will board the Red Belt, and as my friend Drake Breckenridge, whom you met to-night, is a surgeon, I will ask him to accompany us in that capacity, which he will be glad to do, for we were boys together."

"Let us go now and tell him the muss these Spaniards have gotten us into," and the two friends left the rooms in search of Doctor Breckenridge, who, upon being asked by Crittenden, readily consented to serve them as a surgeon upon the field of honor.

CHAPTER XX.

UNTO THE DEATH.

It was shortly after noon, on the day following the challenges of the Spaniards, that a carriage drove down to the levee, at a point opposite to which lay the Red Belt at anchor, and three persons sprung out.

They were Captain Crittenden, Isodor, and Doctor Drake Breckenridge, one of the gentlemen who had been a witness to the scene in the supper-room at the hotel.

Hailing the yacht, a boat was sent ashore, and soon after the three stood on the deck of the pretty craft.

"Run the Spanish flag up to the fore, Mr. Field; I mean it for a signal," said Crittenden, and he turned toward the Spanish brig-of-war El Moro, lying at anchor a short distance away.

It was not long, after the Spanish flag was displayed, before a cutter was seen to put off from the side of the El Moro.

In it were four officers, ten seamen and a coxswain.

"Field, detail ten seamen and a coxswain to go into that cutter, when she comes alongside, and return on board the El Moro."

"This was your compromise, was it, Duke?" asked Doctor Breckenridge.

"Yes, Drake, De Garmo seemed afraid to trust his precious life on board, so I told Cardena to send with him ten seamen, and a coxswain, to work my yacht, and I would place as many of my crew as hostages on board the brig."

Doctor Breckenridge laughed at the caution of the Spaniards, and said:

"There are four officers in the boat."

"Yes, De Garmo, Gracias, Cardena and a surgeon."

"There may not be so many to return," was the significant response, and, dismissing all feeling, Crittenden walked to the gangway, greeted his visitors in a hospitable manner, ordered his coxswain and ten seamen to return on board of the El Moro, and await the coming back of the yacht.

Then he led his guests aft, ordered his steward to set out refreshments, and, with the Spanish sailors on duty, got the Red Belt under way.

A run of a couple of hours, and the sun was seen to be near its setting.

The battle-field of two-score years before had been passed, the shores were becoming dark and funereal-looking, so that Crittenden gave the order to his Spanish crew to stand ready to come to anchor.

The yacht then swept around, the anchor was let go, the sails lowered, and Melton Field, the sailing-master, called out:

"All ready, sir!"

"Ay, ay!" answered Crittenden; and then to Lieutenant Cardena he continued:

"Now, senor, we are at your service."

The Spaniard bowed, said something in a low voice to De Garmo, who turned with a scowling brow, and then took up a case of weapons.

"We brought a pair of pistols, Senor Crittenden, which were presented to Lieutenant De Garmo by Captain Atares, who, you may know, is called by his enemies the Cuban Butcher," and Cardena opened the case, revealing a pair of handsomely-mounted pistols.

"They are very handsome; but have they ever been tried?" asked Crittenden.

"No, senor."

"Then never risk your life with an untried weapon."

"The Senor Isodor, who seconds me, will show you a pair of my dueling-pistols, and they have been tried; so take your choice, and arrange with my young friend," and Crittenden turned away.

As the youth said pleasantly:

"The choice is yours, Senor Cardena," the Senor Cardena saw that there could be no trap set against him, so he took up one of the weapons with the remark:

"This will do."

Isodor held out to him the powder and ball, and the two loaded the weapons carefully, each under the eye of the other.

Then a space was marked off with chalk upon the deck, and Isodor called out:

"All ready, Senor Crittenden."

Each principal then came forward, Crittenden in his usual light-fashioned way, and De Garmo stern and black-faced.

A toss-up for positions gave the Spaniard the stand toward the stern, and thither he walked.

Upon one side were ranged the Spanish sailors, and upon the other the few belonging to the yacht, while the Spanish surgeon and Doctor Breckenridge stood near by, a little aft.

It was a fateful moment, and a strange scene, as Isodor, who had won the word, stepped forward and placed the pistol in Duke Crittenden's hand, while Cardena did the same for Lieutenant De Garmo.

In breathless silence all then stood for an instant, and then it was broken by Isodor's clear voice:

"Senors, are you ready?"

"Ay, ay, sir," came Crittenden's cheery response, in direct contrast to De Garmo's sullen:

"St, senor."

"Fire!"

The weapons flashed almost together, and De Garmo sprang into the air and fell to the deck heavily, while Crittenden stood upright and unharmed, for the Spaniard's bullet had merely grazed his forehead, leaving a red trace, where half an inch to the right would have been instant death.

The Spanish surgeon sprang to the side of the fallen lieutenant, and hastily threw open his coat and vest.

There, a red stain told the story, for the bullet had pierced his heart.

"He is dead, senors," said the surgeon in a suppressed tone, and at his words the cheerful face of Crittenden became strangely grave, while he said in a low tone:

"I regret to take life, Isodor; but I saw that he meant to kill me, and so fired to save my life, for this shows that he was a dead shot," and Captain Crittenden wiped away the blood-stain upon his forehead.

"Now, Senor Isodor, I am at your service," he added, in his old way, throwing off the gloom upon him, and with a bow he advanced toward Cardena, while he said:

"There is a second meeting now, senor, and our light will leave us soon," and he glanced toward the sun, the lower disk of which had just touched the tree-tops.

Cardena was a trifle nervous, for he had not expected the result that had come about, as Lieutenant De Garmo was noted as a crack shot, and a cool hand under fire.

"It will be different this time, Senor Cardena," said Midshipman Gracias in a low tone, and a cruel look in his eyes.

"I hope so, Gracias, for this is a bitter blow,

and that young American is a man to be dreaded."

"I know that I'll end yonder boy's career."

"Don't be too sure and get reckless, Gracias, for I have heard the boy was a fine swordsman, and you remember he killed Captain Merida in a duel?"

"Yes, but I am the superior of Merida," was the confident reply, and Cardena turned away to see about the weapons.

"My principal will use this blade, Senor Lieutenant; it is one he prizes highly, as he took it from the wearer upon the field," and Crittenden held the Diamond Cutlass in his hand.

Cardena started, for he recognized the weapon at once, having been on the El Moro the day that Captain Atares had lost it on the island.

"My principal's blade is a trifle longer than this one," said Cardena, biting his lips with vexation, as he saw the Diamond Cutlass as the captured property of the Boy Insurgent.

"It matters not, senor, as I will waive your friend having the advantage," Crittenden said with one of his sweetest smiles.

Midshipman Gracias heard the remark and started, while he thought:

"Can it be possible that this boy can be such a superb hand with a blade as to give me odds?"

"No, he cannot," and with his confidence returning he smiled grimly as Cardena escorted him to his position.

Isodor, sad, stern-faced and with eyes that burned in their brilliancy, walked to his stand, and grasped the Diamond Cutlass firmly.

At the word of Captain Crittenden the cutlasses clashed, and fierce and terrible at once was the combat begun.

Almost instantly too the face of Midshipman Gracias lost its look of confidence, for he saw that he had as an adversary one who might prove his master.

Pressing him firmly from the onslaught, Isodor drove him backward step by step, and while the lookers-on eagerly gathered near, the Spanish sailors among them, the Cuban suddenly sent the cutlass of the Spaniard flying far over the yacht's side into the river.

At the same instant the now unnerved midshipman sprang backward to escape the death-blow he was confident of receiving, and his foot slipping he fell upon the deck.

Instantly the foot of Isodor was upon him, the point of his Diamond Cutlass above his heart, while the Boy Insurgent said sternly:

"Senor, let your commander lying dead yonder, be sufficient sacrifice for to-day, for I spare your life, for I have vowed a life-long vendetta against Spaniards."

CHAPTER XXI.

FINAL PLANS.

NEVER in his life before had Midshipman Gracias been brought so near to death, and he was really frightened and humbled.

The dead body of his lieutenant, lying a few paces away, showed him what had so nearly been his fate, and would have, but for the mercy shown him by Isodor Christobal.

The young Spaniard had had his pride very quickly lowered, and, when Isodor removed his foot and drew back, he still remained in his prostrate position, until the youth said:

"Rise, Senor Gracias."

Slowly he arose to his feet, like one dazed, and then said in a husky voice:

"I thank you for my life, Senor Christobal."

Isodor bowed in response and turned away, while Crittenden's rough voice rung out:

"All hands ahoy to make sail and get up anchor!"

The Spanish sailors sprang to their posts with a will, feeling a holy terror of the man who had slain their lieutenant, and in a few minutes the Red Belt began to forge ahead against the current, until, under increased canvas she sped gayly along on her way back to the city.

"Senors, enter the cabin with me, and have a glass of wine," said Crittenden, and Cardena and the surgeon readily accepted the invitation, while the midshipman would have hung sullenly back, had not his brother officer said something in a low tone, when he bowed his acceptance and accompanied the other to the cabin.

There they found a table set out with tempting refreshments, wines and cigars, and all joined in the repast with a relish, though none forgot the form lying dead upon the deck, who had been so full of stern resolve to kill the man who had slain him.

Arriving at her anchorage, the El Moro was signaled with a lantern, and soon after the cutter came alongside with the yacht's crew at the oars, and the Spaniards quickly changed places with them.

Covered with the Spanish flag, Lieutenant De Garmo was lowered into the cutter, Cardena and the surgeon bade farewell to those whom they had met under such painful circumstances, Midshipman Gracias raised his cap in silence, and the boat rowed away.

"Now, Drake, we must return to the hotel," said Crittenden, and half an hour after the three sat in the young yachtsman's rooms, quietly talking over the affair, while the handsome face of Isodor still bore its sad, stern look.

In the morning they met their friends at breakfast, and no shadows rested upon the face of Duke Crittenden as he greeted the ladies, who had heard through Surgeon Breckenridge how the affair had terminated.

"See here, Duke," suddenly cried Doctor Breckenridge, who was glancing over a morning paper.

"I hope nothing has been discovered of our little cruise yesterday, Drake?" quickly said Crittenden.

"No, that remains a secret; but there is a notice here that the El Moro, Spanish brig-of-war, got up anchor suddenly last night, and sailed down the river, which seems to be a surprise, as her officers anticipated remaining here for some time."

"Man proposes, God disposes," was the response of Duke Crittenden, and soon after the party left the table for the parlors, where a note was handed to Isodor.

"Anything wrong, Isodor?" asked Captain Crittenden.

"No, senor; it is a request for me to come to the head-quarters this morning, and have you accompany me."

"We will go at your pleasure, Isodor," responded Crittenden, and shortly after the two friends drove to the mansion, already described as the secret meeting place of the Cuban Junta.

Isodor was most warmly greeted by his friend the general, to whom he presented Crittenden, and then General Lopez came forward and greeted them, reminding the Cuban youth that he had not forgotten the time when he kept him from landing upon the coast of Cuba, at a time when it would have proven his death to have done so.

All of the Junta seemed particularly pleased with Crittenden, congratulated him upon the work he had done for Isodor and the Cuban cause, and then General Lopez asked:

"Now, Senor Isodor, tell us what you did to frighten away the Spanish brig-of-war, El Moro, for it is a fact that she left port hastily about midnight last night?"

Isodor looked at Crittenden, who answered:

"You will be surprised, senor, to know that both Senor Isodor and I had nothing to do with the hasty departure of the El Moro," and the words of the young American caused one and all of the Cubans to stare with surprise at him, while General Lopez said:

"We are anxious to know the cause of her leaving, senor?"

Then Crittenden told them the story of the Spanish officers entering into a quarrel with Isodor at the table, and of the challenges that followed.

The result of the duels caused every man of the Junta to spring to his feet and break forth in bravos, while General Lopez said earnestly:

"Senor Crittenden, you have done Cuba a great service in killing that man, De Garmo, for he was a bitter foe to our people."

"And you, Senor Isodor, deserve praise for humbling the pride of Midshipman Gonzalez, Gracias whom I know well, and a more arrogant, and at the same time merciless fellow does not live; but I am surprised that you did not run him through."

"Had I not struck his sword from his hand, and he have still held it, I would not have spared him, Senor General; but I never strike a man who is in my power as he was," returned Isodor.

"A noble sentiment, young senor; but in our war we can show little mercy, and must strike at the heart of a Spaniard as we would at the head of a viper."

"Yes, senor, it is a vendetta war between Cubans and Spaniards, the latter having set the example, and I, for one, will never ask mercy at their hands, nor spare those whom I know to have been guilty of cruelties to Cubans," and Crittenden spoke with deep earnestness.

"We prize your strong arm and brave heart most highly, Captain Crittenden, and it was to have a talk with you that we asked Senor Isodor to bring you around to-day, for what we do, must be done at once."

"I thank you, General Lopez, for the confidence placed in me, and I beg to say that my yacht is at your service, as also I wish to give

you my check for the sum of ten thousand dollars, for, now that I have entered the service of Cuba, I do not intend to go in half-way, but with my whole heart, and my life in my hand."

"My dear Senor Crittenden, you are indeed a treasure, and we will avail ourselves of the offer of your fleet vessel, to bear different parties of Patriots over, who are now gathering in this city, Mobile, Pensacola, and Key West."

"You, senor, we desire to offer the rank of Colonel of Cavalry in the Patriot army of Cuba, and I will myself accompany you when you set sail for the island, while our young friend here, Isodor, having proven himself capable of doing a brave man's work, shall have the rank of lieutenant in the sea service of our cause, for he has his own vessel, now about completed, and will be most valuable in running stores, munitions of war and other needed articles into the island, but when can you have your yacht ready Senor Isodor?"

"She is finished, Senor General, or was to have been two days ago, and I shall at once depart for Pensacola and get her ready to carry out your orders," answered the Boy Insurgent.

"Do so, Senor Isodor, and I will have a schooner, laden with arms, meet you at any place you may name, to be transferred to your fleet craft, which, by the way, I would like to know the name of?"

"I have christened her the War Cloud, Senor General, my other yacht having being named the Cloud."

"A good name, and Heaven grant her long life, and a gallant career, which, under your captaincy, I do not doubt she will have," said General Lopez, and after a conversation of an hour longer with the Junta, Isodor and Duke Crittenden took their leave.

That night the Red Belt left the river, with her commander and Isodor on board, and after a rapid run she reached her point of destination, Pensacola, where, to his delight, the Boy Insurgent found his yacht ready awaiting him.

In Pensacola the Cubans had a Secret League, and there were awaiting them there a hundred gallant volunteers for the sacred cause of *Cuba libre*, and these were taken on board the Red Belt and War Cloud and carried to an island in the Gulf, which had been made a rendezvous from which to start to the Gem of the Antilles.

On that island lumbering coasters had deposited precious cargoes of arms and munitions of war, and leaving his yacht there to load up, Isodor had gone in the Red Belt with Captain Crittenden to his home on Mobile Bay, where he knew that his sister anxiously awaited his return.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

AFTER a few days' stay at Cuba Cottage, and during which time Captain Crittenden had gotten other members of the Cuban League there together, he and Isodor bade Estrella farewell, and the Red Belt set sail one dark stormy night.

Isodor had with him his black crew for the War Cloud; but no one would suppose that the Red Belt carried a large cargo of arms, and stowed away beneath her decks, three-score gallant Cuban Patriots.

Straight for the rendezvous island she headed, and transferring her freight, human and otherwise, to the beautiful War Cloud, she was headed for New Orleans, where Colonel Crittenden, her commander, was to be joined by General Lopez and other leaders of Cuba.

With his new yacht heavily laden, Isodor set sail for Cuba, and, in spite of the watchfulness of Spanish cruisers, succeeded in landing one night upon the coast.

There he was met by Leon De Soto, who conducted the men to a secret hiding-place he had found, and by dawn the cargo had also been taken there in safety, and the War Cloud set sail on another perilous voyage.

Upon the further services rendered by the gallant Boy Insurgent, Colonel Crittenden and Leon De Soto, I will not further dwell, as their daring deeds in behalf of poor, struggling Cuba, are written in history, and history so full of adventure and romance that one would believe it fiction.

Did one follow the career of Isodor, the Boy Insurgent, in his daring deeds on sea and land, in the long months of a cruel, relentless, merciless war, that was in truth a vendetta between Cubans and Spaniards, he would indeed admit the correctness of the old adage, that "Truth is stranger than fiction."

THE END.

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